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THE SHADOW GIRL

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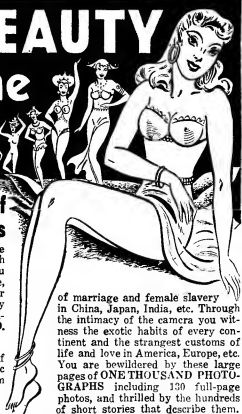
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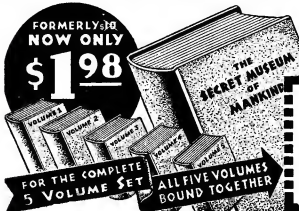
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Spring
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Science Fiction QUARTERLY

ONE OF MR. CUMMINGS' MOST FAMOUS NOVELS

THE SHADOW GIRLRay Cummings 4

Out of the misty realms of time came the strange tower and with it, a man and a lovely girl, seeking vengeance on one who dwelt in our own epoch. Here is a novel which will grip you with its strangeness, its cosmic scope, and fantastic, yet real action.

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Their quest lay outside the usual spacelanes, and it led them to the strangest world man had ever found. And they found, when they landed, that a grim cosmic joke had been played upon them, for their most powerful rockets were helpless to fling them off the little world.

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MISSIONJohn Hollis Mason 141

The planet was theirs for the taking—or so the Martian thought—

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PRIME BASEThe Editor 144

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THE SHADOW GIRL

Out of the misty reaches of time came a man and girl of the distant future—New York to wreak vengeance upon Dr. Turber, prominent physician of 1945. But what mystery lay behind Turber's Indian assistant, who seemed to belong to the New Amsterdam of Peter Stuyvesant, and how could Turber menace Great-New York of 2445?

An absorbing book-length novel by one of science fiction's prime favorites.

CHAPTER I

WHAT THE TELEVISION SHOWED

THE extraordinary and mysterious visions of the shadow girl appeared on the television screen which Alan and I had just erected in his workshop. It was nearly midnight—a hot sultry eve-

ning of late June. The instrument was a Farodyne polychrome receiver; latest model of the multiple-cell semi-oscillating type. We had worked all evening installing it. Alan's sister, Nanette, sat quietly in a corner, modeling a little statue in green clay. Occasionally she would ask us how we were getting along.

We were planning to receive the broadcasting from the powerful

Illustrated by Smolenski.



by RAY CUMMINGS

(Author of "Into the Fourth Dimension," "Beyond the Stars," etc.)

Here Is Another Classic Science Fiction Novel, Reprinted by Your Request

Bound Brook station—a program which had been advertised for 11.30 p. m.

The room was dark as we sat at the small instrument table with the six-foot screen erect against the wall and only the flashing beams from the whirling color-filters to cast a lurid glow upon us. The screen hummed as the current went into it. But at once we saw that something was wrong.

The screen lighted unevenly; we could not locate with any precision the necessary frequency ranges; not one of the three near-by broadcasting studios which we knew were at that moment on the air, would come in.

Nanette was disappointed and impatient as I manipulated the dials at random, and Alan verified the connections. "Is there nothing on it?"

"Presently, Nan. Alan must have

I saw the girl step furtively out into the starlit park.



grounded it badly—I'm sure we have everything else—"

I stopped abruptly. My grip tightened on her arm. We all sat tense. An image was forming on the screen.

Alan said sharply: "Don't touch it, Ed!" I relinquished the dials.

We sat watching, tense, and interested. Then mystified, awed. And presently upon us all there settled a vague, uneasy sense of fear.

For this, confronting us, was the Unknown.

THE screen glowed, not with the normal colors of an interior studio set, but with what seemed a pale, wan starlight. A blurred image; but it was slowly clarifying. A dim purple sky, with misty stars.

We sat staring into the depths of the television screen. Depths unmeasurable; illimitable distance. I recall my first impression when in the foreground faint gray-blue shadows began forming: was this an earthly scene? It seemed not. Blurred shadows in the starlight, crawling mist of shadows, congealing into dim outlines.

We saw presently the wide area of a starlit night. A level landscape of vegetation. Grassy lawns; trees; a purpling brook, shimmering like a thread of pale silver in the starlight. The image was sharp now, distinct, and without suggestion of flicker. Every color rounded and full. Deep-toned nature, pale and serene in the starlight.

A minute passed. In the center foreground of the vista a white wraith was taking form. And suddenly—as though I had blinked—there was a shape which an instant before had not been there. Solid reality. Of everything in the scene, it was most solid, most real.

A huge, gray-white skeleton tower,

its base was set on a lawn where now I could see great beds of flowers, vivid with colored blossoms. The brook wound beside it. It was a pentagon tower. Its height might have been two hundred feet or more, narrowing at the top almost to a point. Skeleton girders with all the substantiality of steel, yet with a color more like aluminum.

We were, visually, fairly close to this tower. The image of it stood the full six feet of our screen. A balcony girded it near the top. A room, like an observatory, was up there, with tiny ovals of windows. Another larger room was midway down. I could see the interior—ladder-steps, and what might have been a shaft with a lifting car.

The tower's base was walled solid. It seemed, as we stared, that like a camera moving forward, the scene was enlarging—

We found ourselves presently gazing, from a close viewpoint, at the base of the tower. It was walled, seemingly by masonry, into a room. There were windows, small and high above the ground. Climbing vines and trellised flowers hung upon the walls. There was a broad, front doorway up a stone flight of steps.

And I became aware now of what I had not noticed before: the gardens surrounding the tower were inclosed with a high wall of masonry. A segment of it was visible now as a background to the scene. A wall, looped and turreted at intervals as though this were some fortress.

The whole lay quiet and calm in the starlight. No sign of human movement. Nanette said:

"But, Edward, isn't any one in sight? No people—"

And Alan: "Ed, look! There—back there on the wall—"

It seemed on the distant wall that

a dark figure was moving. A guard? A pacing sentry?

And now, other movement. A figure appeared in the tower doorway. The figure of a girl. She came slowly from within and stood at the head of the entrance steps. The glow of an interior light outlined her clearly: a slim, small girl, in a robe faintly sky-blue. Flowing hair, pale as spun gold with the light shining on it like a halo.

She stood a moment, quietly staring out into the night. We could not see her face clearly. She stood like a statue, gazing. And then, quietly, she turned and I caught a glimpse of her face—saw it clearly for an instant, its features imprinted clearly on my mind. A young girl, nearly matured; a face, it seemed, very queerly, singularly beautiful—

She moved back into the tower room. There was a sudden blur over the scene. Like a puff of dissipating vapor, it was gone.

The television screen before us glowed with its uneven illumination. The color-filters whirled and flashed their merging beams. Everything was as it had been a few moments before. The broadcasting studios would not come in. Our apparatus was not working properly. The frequency ranges were indeterminate. It was grounded badly. Or our fundamental calibration was in error. Something wrong. What, we never knew.

But we had seen this vision—flung at us, from somewhere. A vision, shining clear in every detail of form and color and movement. The image of things solid and real. Things existing—somewhere.

THAT was the first of the visions. The second came that same night, near dawn. We did not dare to touch

our instrument. The dials, we found, had been set by me at random with a resulting wave-length which could not bring in any of the known broadcasting studios. We left them so, and did not try to find what might be wrong with the hook-up. The image had come; it might come again, if we left things as they were.

We sat, for hours that night, watching the screen. It glowed uneven; many of its cells were dark; others flickered red and green.

Nanette at last fell asleep beside us. Alan and I talked together softly so as not to disturb her. We had promised that if anything showed, we would awaken her. We discussed the possibility. But often we were silent. The thing already had laid its spell upon us. This vision, this little glimpse of somewhere. It had come, perhaps, from some far-distant world? Incredible! But I recall that instinctively I thought so.

Yet why should I? A tower, and a dim expanse of starlit landscape. And a girl, humanly beautiful. Surely these were things that could exist now on our earth. The atmosphere, we knew as a matter of common everyday science, teems with potential visions and sound.

Alan strove to be more rational. "But, Ed, look here—we've caught some distant unknown broadcaster."

"But who broadcasts an outdoor scene at night? This is 1945, Alan, not the year 2000."

He shrugged his wide, thin shoulders. His face was very solemn. He sat with his long, lean length hunched in his chair, chin cupped in his palm, the attitude of a youthful, pagan thinker, fronted with a disturbing problem. But there was a very boyish modernity mingled with it; a lock of his straight black hair fell on his forehead. He seized it, twisted it,

puzzled, and looked up at me and smiled.

Then Alan said a thing very strange; he said it slowly, musingly, as though the voicing of it awed him.

"I think it was on Earth. I wonder if it was something that has been, or that will be—"

It came again, near dawn. The same tower; the same serene, starlit spread of landscape. The same grim encircling wall, with stalking dark figures upon it. We did not at first see the girl. The tower doorway stood open; the room inside glowed with its dim light. A moment of inactivity; and then it seemed that at this inexplicable place at which we were gazing—this unnamable time which seemed the present on our screen—a moment of action had come. A dark figure on the wall rose up—a small black blob against the background of stars. The figure of a man. His arm went up in a gesture.

Another figure had come to the tower doorway, a youth, strangely garbed. We could see him clearly: white-skinned, a young man. He stood gazing; and he saw the signal from the wall, and answered it. Behind him, the girl appeared. We could see them speak. An aspect of haste enveloped all their movements—a surreptitious haste, furtive, as though this that they were doing was forbidden.

The signal was repeated from the wall. They answered. They turned. The youth pushed the girl aside. He was stooping at the doorway, and her eager movements to help seemed to annoy him. He straightened. He had unfastened the tower door. He and the girl slid it slowly closed. It seemed very heavy. They pushed at it. The doorway closed with them inside.

We had awakened Nanette. She

sat tense between us, with her long braids of thick, chestnut hair falling unheeded over her shoulders, her hands gripping each of us.

"Tell me!"

ALAN said: "That door's heavy. They can't close it — yes! They've got it closed. I fancy they're barring it inside. The thing is all so silent—but you could imagine the clang of bars. I don't see the guard on the wall. It's dark over there. There's no one in sight. But, Nan, you can see that something's going to happen. See it—or feel it. Ed, look! Why—"

He broke off. Nanette's grip tightened on us.

A change had fallen upon all the scene. It seemed at first that our instrument was failing. Or that a "hole" had come, and everything momentarily was fading. But it was not that. The change was inherent to the scene itself. The tower outlines blurred, dimmed. This image of its solidarity was dissolving. Real, solid, tangible no longer. But it did not move; it did not entirely fade. It stood there, a glowing shimmering wraith of a tower, gray-white, ghostlike. A thing now of impalpable aspect, incredibly unsubstantial, imponderable, yet visible in the starlight.

The wall was gone! I realized it suddenly. The wall, and the garden and the flowers and the stream. All the background, all the surrounding details gone! The tower, like a ghost, stood ghostly and alone in a void of shapeless gray mist.

But the stars remained. The purple night, with silver stars. But even they were of an aspect somehow different. Moving visibly? For an instant I thought so.

Time passed as we sat there gaz-

ing—time marked only by my dim knowledge that Alan was talking with Nanette. Changes were sweeping the scene. The gray mist of background under the stars held a distance unfathomable. A space, inconceivable, empty to my straining vision.

And then, presently, there were things to see. It seemed that the infinite had suddenly contracted. The wraith of the tower stood unchanged. But abruptly I saw that it stood in a deep wooded area, rearing itself above a tangled forest. A river showed, a mile or so away, crossing the background in a white line. The stars were gone; it was night no longer. A day of blue sky, with white-massed clouds. The sun shone on the distant river.

The tower stood, faded even more in the daylight. I searched the forest glade around its base. Figures were there! Familiar of aspect; a group of savages—of this earth? Yes, I could not mistake them: Indians of North America. Red-skinned, feathered figures, in vivid ceremonial headdress as though this day they had been dancing in the forest glade. And saw the strange apparition of this tower. Saw it? Why, they were seeing it now! Prostrated in a group on the mossy ground, awed, fear-struck; gazing fearfully upon this thing unknown; prostrate because this thing unknown must therefore be a god; and being a god, must be angry and threatening and to be placated.

AN INSTANT; and I knew that this which Alan Tremont, Nanette Tremont, and Edward Williams were vouchsafed was a mere pause. A tableau. A snatched vision from somewhere — sometime; presented all in an instant and whirled away.

But the phantom of the tower stood motionless, unchanged. The gray background whirled, pregnant with things unseeable. No! It was night. There were the familiar, unchanging stars. I became aware that the wraith of the tower was solidifying. The gray shadows under it were turning dark. Gray—then black—then deep green. Trees and grass. A small white spread of water near at hand.

The tower now was solid, tangible and real of aspect as we had first seen it. The doorway was still closed. Around it now was the dark stretch of a cultivated parklike space. All clear and distinct. A reality here, beyond anything we had seen before.

I gasped. Alan's swift words to Nanette echoed as though from my own thoughts. This was wholly familiar! This familiar space, pictured in quiet detail upon the screen. Familiar trees, little paths with benches along them, grassy lawns, a small, starlit lake. A winding roadway, with lights at intervals. In the distance, behind the tower, I could see plainly a large, low building of stone. A city street behind it, beyond the park. All familiar.

Alan gasped: "Why, it's here! This is barely a mile from us! That's Central Park! That's the Metropolitan Museum!"

Central Park, New York City. But when? We knew there was no tower like that in Central Park. Was this the future of Central Park at which we were staring?

THE vision was more than a glimpse now. It held, vividly persisting in every reality of its smallest detail. The same space of that forest glade. But now man called it "Central Park." No ignorant savages were prostrated here now, be-

fore this phantom of the tower. No one here—

And then I saw, in the foreground, a man in a blue uniform standing on one of the paths of the park. A light shone on him. He stood, pressed backward against the light-pole; staring at the tower with a hand upflung against his mouth. Instinctive fear. But not prostrate upon the ground. He stood tense. And dropped his hand and stood peering. Incredulous.

"Ed—see that police officer there! He sees the tower!"

The tower door opened. I fancied I saw the figure of the girl step furtively out and disappear into the shadows of the starlit park. I could not be sure. It was dark. But in the background, above the Metropolitan Museum, above the city buildings lining Fifth Avenue, I could see that the east was glowing with the coming dawn. A mass of billowing clouds flushed pink.

The tower doorway was closed again. The tower melted into a specter, illusive, tenuous, but still there. A gossamer tower. And then, it was gone. Everything was gone. But as though, in my fancy, or perhaps merely the persistence of vision, for one brief instant I seemed to see the park empty of the intruding tower; and the policeman, standing there incredulous at this that he had seen which was now vanished.

The television screen was empty of image. Alan was on his feet. "Ed! Look at the sky out there! That's the same sky!"

The workshop faced to the east. The same star-strewn sky of the vision was outside our window—the same sky, with the same modeling of clouds, flushed with the coming day.

Alan voiced my realization. "Why,

that's this dawn we've been seeing! That tower—in the park behind us—that policeman is out there now—he saw it! That's today! That just happened—now!"

CHAPTER II

THRESHOLD OF A MYSTERY

IT WAS clear to us, or at least in part, what had occurred. The little fragment of Space occupied by Central Park, was throughout both the visions, what we had been seeing. The tower was there; the tower had not moved—in Space. We had first seen it in some far distant realm—of Time. And it had moved, not in Space, but in Time. We had glimpsed the tower almost stopping, frightening those savages who, in what we call the Past, were roaming this little island of Manhattan. The same Space. The same inclosing rivers. But no city back then. Or perhaps, near the southern end, where the converging rivers merged in broader water, there might just then have been a group of struggling settlers. Cabins of hewn, notched logs, stockaded against the marauding redskins of the adjacent forest. A dense forest then, was north of the trail called "Maiden Lane." Far up there was this Space which now we call Central Park, with the great New York now around it, grown in three short centuries from the infant New Amsterdam.

And the tower, immovable in Space, had come in Time to 1945. Had paused. Now. This very morning. Had stopped; and frightened a policeman of 1945, in Central Park. And then had become again a phantom, and in another instant, wholly invisible.

I recall my surprise at Alan's apparent understanding of this incredible thing which had come, all unheralded, upon us.

I found suddenly that there were things in the life of Alan which I did not know. Things he shared with Nanette; but not with me. An eagerness was in his manner as we discussed this thing. His dark cheeks were flushed with emotion; his dark eyes had a queer glow of excitement.

"I think, Ed, that I can understand a good many things of this. Things father knew, in theory—things he told me—" He checked himself. And when I questioned, he stopped me.

"Wait, Ed. It's confusing. It seems—tremendous." He stumbled over the word, but repeated it. "Tremendous." And then he added: "And perhaps—dastardly."

What could he mean by that? Nanette said: "But, Alan—that girl—there was a girl, came here to New York this morning—"

The girl! The shadow girl, from out of the shadows! She, at least, was something tangible now. We had seen her in Central Park this morning. The television screen now was vacant. It was destined never again to show us anything, but that we did not know. We had seen a girl arriving? Then, if so, she must be here—in Central Park, now.

Alan said: "I wonder if we should report it. That girl probably will be found." He had been into one of the other rooms of the small apartment a few moments before. He drew me there now. "Ed, I want to show you something significant. Perhaps significant—I don't know, yet."

Nanette followed after us. The bedroom faced south. We were high

in a towering apartment building, just east of Fifth Avenue.

Over the lower roofs of the city I could see far to the south. In the waning starlight down there a single searchlight beam was standing up into the sky.

"Where is it?" I demanded. "The Battery? A ship in the harbor? Or Staten Island?"

Somewhere down there, a white shaft of light standing motionless. It was fading in the growing daylight.

"On Staten Island," said Alan. "It's a small searchlight on the roof of the Turber Hospital. It often stands like that. Haven't you ever noticed it?"

I supposed I had. But never thought of it. Why should I?

Alan added musingly: "It's queer—because I was wondering if it would chance to be there now, and there it is."

"But, Alan, see here—you're making a mystery of this. Heaven knows it's mysterious enough of itself, without your adding more."

HE SMILED. I saw suddenly a grimness as the smile faded and he set his wide, thin lips. There were things which he was beginning to piece together. Things, involving us so soon into such a maelstrom of events! But now, Alan only said:

"This Dr. Turber—Wolf Turber—have you ever heard of him?"

"No," I said. "What has he to do with this? Whatever it is, you've guarded it very carefully from me, Alan."

There must have been a touch of bitterness in my tone. He laughed. "Nonsense! I haven't known anything worth discussing."

Nanette touched me: "It was

something father told us just before he died. Just a theory of his—a suspicion."

"So inexplicable," said Alan. "But he was so earnest, that morning he died. Telling us what might be things of scientific fact, but probably would never be disclosed—to us or any one. Yet now it may be—these things this morning seem to fit in. Ed, it's no secret—not from you."

"Then," I said, "who is Dr. Turber? What is he to you?"

"Nothing. He was, in 1925, a young medical student. Then, for a short while, he worked for father. He now owns the Turber Hospital—a private institution, a sort of sanatorium. He is, in his way, a genius. A specialist in nervous disorders. And father said he was—or would have been, had he stuck at it—an eminent physician. But he did not. He left father—he stole, father thought, a large sum of father's money. I don't know the details. They're not important. Nothing was proved. He became—well, you might call him father's enemy. Certainly they disliked each other. I've met him casually several times. A scoundrelly sort of fellow, by his look. And that—of what I actually know—is all."

We were back in the workshop. The television screen still glowed, but it was empty of image. Nanette said gently: "Tell him, Alan, about Dr. Turber, and me."

It gave me a start. Alan said: "He seems to have fallen head over heels in love with Nanette. He had always liked her—"

"I was always afraid of him," she put in.

"And when Nanette grew up, even though then he was father's enemy, Turber came to him—wanted to marry Nanette—"

I could well imagine it. Nanette

was tall, slim, with long chestnut hair incongruous in this day of short-haired girls. To me she was very beautiful indeed.

Alan went on: "I won't go into details. His persistent attentions were unwelcome. Father told him so, and Nanette told him."

"I was always afraid of him," she repeated.

ALAN smiled wryly. "I threw him out once—a snaky sort of fellow. We want none of him—do we, sister?"

"No," she said. "Tell Edward about Dr. Turber's life—father's theory."

"It wouldn't mean much to you, Ed. There were things—so father thought—of mystery about this Turber. Things inexplicable. His curious, unexplained absences from the hospital. Things about him which father sensed. And the searchlight, that for no apparent reason for years now has been occasionally flashing from the hospital roof. It marks Turber's absence, I know that much."

"And Turber's assistant," said Nanette. "That Indian—whatever he is—at the hospital."

"Yes. He, too. Father pieced it together into a very strange, half-formed theory. I have always thought it must have been born of father's dislike for the fellow. And father told it to me the morning of his death. That, too, I felt, must have colored it. Father's mind, there at the last, roaming a little—not quite clear. But this, Ed—this morning—these visions of ours—we saw them, you know, we can't deny that. They seem vaguely, to fit. Oh, there's no use theorizing—not yet. That girl we saw—"

Upon the girl it hinged, of course. The vision was gone. And at best it

was only a vision. But the girl might be real—here in 1945.

We did not report what we had seen to the police. Perhaps we had fancied that a girl came out of a phantom tower in Central Park this morning. And, if we had seen it on the television, even so, it might not actually have happened.

Had there actually been a policeman, there in the park, who had seen it? And was there existing, here in New York today, this girl of the shadows?

We waited, and the thing turned tangle indeed! Became a reality, for presently we learned that it had touched others than ourselves.

The early afternoon papers carried a small item. Some of them put it on the front page. But it was only a joke—a little thing to read, to laugh at, and forget. There had been in actuality, a policeman at dawn in Central Park; and he had been less reticent, more incautious than ourselves. He had told what he saw. And the newspapers wrote it:

Ghost of Eiffel Tower Invades
Central Park

—
Policeman Fights Phantom

Something to laugh at, and forget. A chuckle, donated to a busy city by earnest Officer Macfarland who undoubtedly was already sorry that he had not kept his mouth shut.

And the girl?

The later afternoon papers carried another item. Who would connect the two? Who, indeed! For this other item was still smaller, unobtrusive, not even amusing. Nor novel—and therefore, worthy of nothing but a passing glance:

Unknown girl found at gate of
Central Park. Unable to speak

intelligibly. Victim of amnesia. Taken to Bellevue. Later transferred to Turber Hospital, Staten Island.

Who would think anything of that? But we three knew that we stood upon the threshold of a mystery, with its shadowy portals swinging wide to lure us in.

CHAPTER III

THE GIRL PRISONER

WE LEFT Nanette at home and Alan and I started for the Turber Hospital about three o'clock that same afternoon.

Was this the girl of our visions, now the "victim of amnesia" at Dr. Turber's Sanatorium? Or was it merely some other girl whose memory had gone, and whose prosaic parents soon would come to claim her? Things like that frequently happened. We determined to find out. Both of us were sure we would recognize her.

From the ferryhouse on Staten Island we took a taxi, a few miles into the interior. It was an intensely hot, oppressive afternoon—the sun was slanting in the west when we reached our destination.

I found the Turber Hospital occupying a fairly open stretch of country, about a mile from the nearest town. It stood on a rise of ground—a huge quadrangle of building, completely inclosing an inner yard. It was four stories high, of brick and ornamental stone; balconies were outside its upper windows, with occasional patients sitting in deck chairs with lattice shades barring the glare of sunlight.

There were broad shaded grounds about the building—the whole en-

compassing, I imagined, some twenty or thirty acres. Trees and paths and beds of flowers. A heavy, ten-foot ornamental iron fence with a barbed wire top inclosed it all. A fence which might have been to keep out the public, but which gave also the impression of keeping in the inmates. The place looked, indeed, very much like the average asylum. There was an aura of wealth about it; but, unlike most such places, also a look of newness.

"Turber built it in the last eight years," said Alan. "He's doing very well—rich patients of the neurotic, almost insane but not quite, variety."

There were some of them about the grounds now. Off at one end I could see tennis courts with games in progress.

"Spent a lot of money," I commented.

"Yes—they say he's very rich."

Bordering the grounds was a scattered, somewhat squalid neighborhood of foreigners. We had crossed a trolley line and ascended a hill arriving at the main gateway of the institution. I glanced back through the rear window of our taxi. We were on a commanding eminence; I could see across the rolling country, over several smoky towns to New York Harbor; the great pile of buildings on lower Manhattan was just visible in the distant haze.

The gatekeeper passed us at Alan's request to see Dr. Turber. Our taxi swung up a winding roadway to the porte-cochere at the side of the building.

"Will he see us?" I demanded.

"If he's here, I imagine he will."

"But you're not, even outwardly, friends?"

He shrugged. "We speak pleasantly enough when we have occasion to

meet. So long as he lets Nanette alone."

We were ushered into the cool quiet of a reception room. The white-clad nurse said that doubtless Dr. Turber would see us presently—he was busy at the moment. She left us.

It was a fairly large room of comfortable wicker chairs; Oriental rugs on a hardwood, polished floor; a large wicker center table strewn with the latest magazines. A cool, dim room; there were broad French windows, with shades partly drawn and additionally shrouded with heavy velvet portieres across the window alcove.

We had seated ourselves. Alan drew his chair nearer to mine. He spoke softly, swiftly, with an eye upon the archway that gave onto the main lower corridor down which the nurse had gone.

"I was thinking, Ed—when Turber comes—we've got to have some excuse for seeing the girl."

"Yes, but what?"

"Tell him—I'll tell him you're a newspaper man. Some of them have been here already, no doubt. We won't go into it—you won't have to say much."

I was, in actuality, a pilot in the mail service from Bennett Field down the coast to Miami. I was off now, these three summer months. But posing as a newspaper man was out of my line.

"I don't know," I said dubiously. "I have no credentials. If he asks me—"

"I'll do most of the talking, Ed." He jumped up suddenly, went to glance into the corridor, and came back. "Come here, want to show you something."

He drew me to the windows. We pushed the portieres aside, and raised one of the shades. We were some ten feet above the level of the paved

inner courtyard. Alan murmured: "Just look, Ed—queer construction of this place! I've often wondered, and so did father."

Queer construction indeed! The quadrangular building completely inclosed this inner yard. At the basement level it was all normal enough. Windows and doors opening from what seemed engine rooms; the kitchen; the laundry. And at this first story it was normal also. These windows through which we were looking; and other windows and occasional balconies in each of the wings. But above this first story there were three others and then the flat roof above them. And in these three upper floors so far as I could see there was not a window! Nothing but the sheer, blank stone walls!

"What would you make of that, Ed? Crazy architecture—they said that when the place was built. There are no courtyard rooms at all in the upstairs floors—nearly half the building goes to waste. Turber designed it—"

"But what did he say?"

"Nothing much, I fancy. It was his own business. Perhaps, merely that he could afford the luxury of all outside rooms for his patients. And look at that inner building—"

THE courtyard was perhaps two hundred feet long, by half as wide. In its center was an oblong brick building, a hundred feet by sixty possibly—and not quite as high as the roof of the main structure. From the angle at which we were gazing, I could see the full front face of this smaller building, and part of one of its ends. It had not a window! Nor a door, except one, very small, at the ground in the center of the front!

"Turber's laboratory," said Alan. "At least, that's what it's supposed

to be. That one door—nothing else. It's always locked. Nobody has even been in there but Turber, and his Indian assistant. Father once talked with the builders of this place, Ed. That laboratory is nothing but two small rooms at the ground level here in front. All the rest is just four solid brick walls inclosing an inner empty space! What's it for? Nobody knows. But people talk. You can't stop them. Turber's employees here. And most of all, his patients—not quite sane. They talk—of ghosts—things mysteriously going on inside those walls—"

People—not quite sane—talking of things unknowable. But I was wholly sane; and as I stood there, gazing at the shadows of twilight gathering in this inner courtyard; the blank upper walls of the large building turning dark with night; the smaller one, standing blank and silent in the courtyard—the whole place seemed suddenly ominous, sinister!

A STEP sounded in the room behind us. I started violently; I had not realized how taut were my nerves. We dropped the portieres hastily, and left the window. Turber?

But it was not he. A young man stood before us. He was dressed in flannels and a shirt open at the throat. He carried a tennis racket.

"Well," said Alan. "How are you, Charlie? Been playing tennis? You remember me, don't you?"

A good-looking young fellow. He said: "Do I? You were here once before, weren't you? I saw you in here with Dr. Turber."

"Yes," said Alan. "Let's sit down, Ed. How are you, Charlie?"

We sat down. Charlie stood before us. "I've been playing tennis. Is the doc coming here to see you?"

His face clouded. "You're all right, aren't you? My mother said—" He was addressing me. "My mother said—but look here, don't pay any attention to your mother if she says you're sick. Don't you do it! I did it, and my mother said I'll put you in here and make you well. So look what happened to me—I'm in here."

I met Alan's glance. Alan said: "Well, that's fine, Charlie. And you're better, aren't you?"

"Yes." He hesitated; then he added: "I'm better, and I'd like to help you get better. I was thinking that, last time I saw you. I like you—very much."

"Do you, Charlie? That's nice of you."

"Yes. You're a friend of mine—'Friends sturdy and true' I was thinking—that's us."

He turned suddenly away. He took a step toward the window, and came back. His face had wholly changed; a look of cunning was on it; his voice low, quivering, dramatic.

"You were looking out there when I came in. Strange things go on out there—but you can't see them in the daytime!"

"Can't you?" said Alan. "I was looking—"

"I've seen them—at night. I've got a way to see them any time I want to. From the roof. If you get put in here—I'll show you—maybe. Because we're friends."

IT GALVANIZED Alan into action. He jumped to his feet and gripped Charlie.

"I'd like you to show me."

"Yes, I can do it. There's a girl came this morning. I saw her—"

"A girl?"

"Beautiful girl. She was beautiful—I saw her. They took her upstairs. I know where."

Alan gestured to me. "Watch out if anybody comes! Charlie, tell me!"

I moved nearer the corridor entrance. Alan and Charlie stood by the window. I could hear them.

"She's sick, but her mother didn't bring her. Men brought her—in a taxi like I saw you come in."

"Charlie, if I should come here—"

"I've got a key to the roof. You're not allowed up there. Nobody's ever been up there but me. I'm too smart for them—'Keys to open Bluebeard's room'—you can't open anything without a key. Keys to open Bluebeard's—"

"Charlie, stop that!"

"Well, I have. It's dark. Nothing ever happens in the light. You can see it from the roof, because you're higher up and you can look down inside."

"Inside what?"

"His laboratory. That's what they call it. 'Four walls to hide what devils do'—that's Shakespeare. I studied it, when I was in school. But mother said I was sick—"

"Wait, Charlie. That girl—"

"She's sick, I guess. We're all sick. But she was frightened, too. I'm not frightened. I passed them in the hall. She looked at me—I saw she was frightened. I said then to myself I guess I can help that girl. I'm smart—I've got keys."

If Turber should come! But the corridor was empty.

"You know which room is the girl's, Charlie?"

"Yes."

"You've got a key to it?"

"Key? I've got a key to Bluebeard's closet—"

Alan shook him. "The girl's room—where they've got her now."

"Key to Bluebeard's room—don't get excited—I'm not excited." He

was trembling. "When you come to live here—"

"Charlie, listen! I want to help that girl—get her out of here. She isn't sick."

"I can get out of here—but my mother told me not to. I've got a key to the little gate in the fence behind the tennis court. I've had it a long time. You know how to make a key? You take wax and get an impression—I had a locksmith make the key when I was home at Christmas. Mother thought it was my trunk key—but it wasn't. I thought I might use it to slip out and go home some night. Only mother would be angry. And I had Bluebeard's key made at the same time—that's the key to the roof, where you can see things—"

From the door I caught a glimpse of a man approaching along the corridor.

"Alan! Here he comes!"

Alan said vehemently: "Charlie, listen! Get this right! Tonight, about ten o'clock! Can you have your keys and come to the tennis court gate?"

"Yes! Tonight—"

"Can you get there, alone? Tell nobody? Let nobody see you!"

"Yes. At night—dark deeds, alone." He heard Dr. Turber's step. He added swiftly: "I'll be there—ten o'clock to-night! I can hide you in my room. At eleven, they're all asleep—we'll go to the roof—I call it Bluebeard's—"

"Not a word to anybody, Charlie! For the girl's sake!"

"Yes! And because we're friends —"

Alan pushed him away; and said, conversationally: "So you had a good game, Charlie? That's fine—but you'd better go wash up for supper."

"All right, I will. Mother said never be late for supper."

We all turned as Dr. Turber entered the room.

I SAW Dr. Wolf Turber as a man of about forty, obviously of extraordinary personality. There are many men in this world who have a power, for good or evil, which marks them apart from their fellows. A radiation—an aura—a something in their unconscious bearing; a confidence, a flash of the eye, all unmistakable. Dr. Turber was such a one. Marked for big things—good or evil.

He was, to me at least, at once physically repellent of aspect. A very heavy, powerful frame, with wide shoulders, thick and solid; a deep chest; long powerful arms. Had he stood erect, he might have been fully six feet tall. But he was hunched. Not exactly a hunchback; rather, a permanent stoop which had rounded his shoulders almost to a deformity.

His head was massive, set low on a wide, short neck. Close-cropped black hair, turning gray at the temples. A solid, wide-jawed face, smooth-shaved, with dark eyes gazing through a pair of incongruously dapper rimless glasses, from which a wide black ribbon depended.

He stood before us; stooped, but with the strength of a gorilla seeming to lie hidden in his squat frame, masked by the dapperness of his clothes. Pointed patent leather shoes; gray trousers; a dark gray jacket with a white waist-coat, to which the black eyeglass ribbon was fastened. He stood with a hand toying with the ribbon.

"He annoyed you, Tremont? Charlie's a good boy. A little off mentally—like most of them here."

Charlie had been summarily dismissed. Turber added: "You do not bring the charming little Nanette.

Where is she? I would far rather see her than you, Tremont."

Alan, from his six-foot height gazed down at Turber. He ignored the reference to Nanette, and said:

"There was a girl found in Central Park this morning. Amnesia case, the papers say. Transferred here from Bellevue. My friend Williams here does some newspaper writing—he'd like to see her."

Turber's face remained calmly polite. His gaze went to me. It made my heart leap—his quiet, keen scrutiny, as though without effort he might read my thoughts.

"A girl? Amnesia case? No girl came here." His glance swung between us; but his wide, thin-lipped mouth was smiling ironically. He added: "You believe what you read, evidently. You are trustful."

Alan's shortness of temper surprised me. "Then you won't let us see her."

"No, why should I?"

"But you admit that she's here?"

There was no love lost between these two! Turber rasped:

"Why should I bother to let you cross-examine me?"

It quieted Alan. "I know she's here. What you mean is, I have no right to demand seeing her."

Turber bowed ironically.

"I can get that fixed up," said Alan. "Perhaps."

"Oh, I think I can." Alan was smiling now, with recovered poise. "In the first place, she is undoubtedly a public charge until her identity is established. Why Bellevue sent her to you, I can't imagine—"

"That, like everything else you are saying, is none of your business."

"But I intend to make it my business. They'll give Williams and me an order to see her." Quite evidently Alan knew his ground. "Come on,

Ed—we're wasting time. Let's go see what they say at Bellevue. There are a lot of things about this I don't understand."

TURBER said abruptly: "If you come as a friend, Tremont—"

His imperturbable smile remained; but it was evident that Alan's persistence was disturbing. I could even fancy, alarming. "But you come, gruffly demanding—and you bring the power of the Press." The faint inclination of his head toward me was a bow of mockery. "You frighten me—"

"Why? Is it something mysterious?"

"It seems to be. Your sudden insistence—I have not seen you in a year. I have had several amnesia patients here, all ignored by you."

Beneath his bantering manner he was trying no doubt, to fathom what Alan knew.

Alan was silent. I said: "Well, I'd be mighty interested to write up the case. But if we have to get an order from the Health Department—"

"We'll get it," said Alan.

Turber made an abrupt decision. "You may see her. You're an annoying young cub, Tremont. I know you well enough to realize that."

"Can we see her now?" Alan demanded.

"Yes. But only for a moment. Her memory is gone. I was hoping, with my routine treatment, we could get it back."

He led us into the corridor, stalking ahead of us with his heavy head. "This way—she is upstairs."

He turned a corner. Alan whispered: "Watch where we're going! Try to remember the location of the room! How old is she, Dr. Turber?"

"About twenty, apparently. A

strange-looking little creature. I would say, of a cultured family."

We mounted a staircase. Passed down another corridor. I tried to keep my sense of location. I said: "Is she an American?"

"Probably not." He shrugged. "She is dressed very strangely. She resisted the matrons at Bellevue who would have changed her robe. She looks as though she might have wandered from some fancy dress affair last night. But by now something would be known of it, I suppose. The police have full details. I shall send her back to Bellevue—I'm not looking for any bizarre publicity."

We passed occasional inmates in the halls; they stared at us curiously, scattering and vanishing at Turber's glance. One was the young fellow, Charlie. He appeared magically at my elbow, flashed me a swift, knowing glance, and disappeared.

Abnormality was in the air, everywhere about this place. Heavy carpeted hallways; dim, with lights not yet lighted in the afternoon twilight. These patients—most of them seemed to be young men—free to move about, in apparent health; indefinably, but unmistakably abnormal. The whole place struck me as almost gruesome.

"This way, Tremont."

We were in the upper story, close under the roof. There was an elevator in the front of the building; we had not used it, but had mounted three separate flights of stairs, each remote from the other. I fancied we were at the top of the wing across from the reception room.

Turber paused and took a key from his pocket. I had noticed as we came along the halls that all the rooms opened outward; the inner side facing the courtyard was always a blank corridor wall, with no suggestion of rooms. But Turber now paused at a

small, heavy mahogany door—on the courtyard side.

"She is here, Tremont. I have her locked in. She escaped from somewhere. It is often a trait of these cases—the desire to escape. If she eluded me here, the authorities would have plenty to say."

He stood a moment, cautioning us in low tones. The girl would be startled—she was startled at seeing any one. But to be mildly startled might be good for her. He smiled. "Amnesia has been cured by a blow upon the head. But I don't recommend it."

We were to do no more than stand in the doorway. For a moment only.

"May I talk to her?" I suggested.

"That," he said, "would be useless. She could not understand; and her own words are wholly unrecognizable."

THERE was another door directly across the hall. It stood open, disclosing a bedroom, into the windows of which the setting sun was streaming. A man came to its doorway. Turber's Indian assistant, Alan afterward told me; evidently he was here on guard. He did not speak; he saw Dr. Turber, and moved back into the room.

But for that instant he was visible I think I have never had a more startling impression. A man, clad in trousers and white shirt; of huge stature, well over six feet. Straight black hair, parted in the middle; a red-brown face, flat-nosed. But more than that. I saw something about him which was uncanny. An indescribable impression of something incredibly sinister. Something weird.

He had a magazine in his hand. If it had been a tomahawk dripping blood, if his face with its broken nose had been streaked with ochre,

if his body had been bare of those civilized garments—it would have seemed far more normal. He grunted as he met Dr. Turber's glance and turned away.

Turber repeated: "I think I would not speak to her—but you may if you like."

He knocked on the girl's door. He then turned the lock and pushed the door inward.

We crowded at the threshold. It was a small, comfortably furnished bedroom. Windowless. A wicker table, with an electrolier giving a soft glow of yellow light. The girl stood like a startled fawn in the center of the room. It was the girl we had seen on the television!

A creature, here in life, of fairy-like delicacy. Almost unreal. She was not over five feet tall; slight and delicate of mold; a girlhood upon the brink of maturity. A fairy creature, like a vision of girlhood in a child's fairy dream. White-limbed; wearing a pale, sky-blue robe—a drapery rather than a dress. Flowing hair, pale as spun gold. A face, oval and small, exquisite, delicate as a cameo. Eyes, sky-blue—

They stared at us, those sky-blue eyes. Startled. But they were not vacant eyes, nor confused; not the eyes of a person mentally deranged. They swung toward Dr. Turber; and as momentarily he turned away they came back to Alan. And in them I read—and Alan read—a mute, furtive look of appeal!

CHAPTER IV

THE SECRET OF THE COURTYARD

THE gray walls of the Turber Sanatorium were painted red by the falling sun when we departed in our waiting taxi. The

episode with the girl had taken only a moment. I had spoken to her; I said fatuously:

"Don't you know us?"

She did not seem to try to answer. Her gaze swung from Alan to me. She took a step backward; as though the sound of my voice were frightening; but I could have sworn she was watching Turber; it was Turber of whom she was afraid, not us.

"Come," he said. "That's enough." We had not crossed the threshold. He closed the door upon the girl; her gaze seemed still searching Alan's face as it closed.

Turber led us back downstairs. He chatted pleasantly about the girl's case; he accompanied us to the door and smilingly bowed us out.

"I shall hope to see you again, Tremont. Bring Nanette when you come next time, will you?" He said it sardonically. But more than that, for beneath his banter there was an intensity that made me shudder. And a pang of fear for Nanette swept me. We had left her home alone.

Turber stood gazing after us as we drove away. I recall him, standing there on the steps of the portecochere; hunched forward; his gorilla figure so immaculately garbed, fingers toying with his black eyeglass ribbon, his mouth twisted with a faint sardonic smile. Sinister figure! Satanic! A very modern Mephistopheles, this fellow Turber. A genius—for evil; of that, at least, I was now convinced.

We were silent on the way back in the taxi. My mind was on Nanette. It seemed suddenly that she must be in danger; my greatest desire was to get back as quickly as we could.

We dismissed the taxi. At the ferryhouse I said abruptly: "Alan, let's telephone Nanette."

"Why?"

"I'm worried about her," I stammered. "Alan, that fellow Turber—"

We called the apartment. She answered promptly.

"You all right, Nanette?" I demanded.

"Why, yes, of course, Edward. When will you be back? I've been worried about you."

"We'll be there in an hour."

I hung up. I felt unutterably relieved. We boarded the ferry.

"What do you propose to do next?" I asked Alan.

"Get our car—come back to-night."

"With Nanette?"

"Yes. I know how you feel. That fellow Turber—this weird thing—"

"No time to leave Nanette alone. I wish she weren't there now."

"We'll be there shortly. When we come back, you'll stay in the car with her," Alan directed.

While he was meeting Charlie at the tennis court gate? I did not fancy so inactive a role.

"It's best, Ed. Only one of us should go in. With both of us, the chance of being discovered would be greater. Besides, we daren't leave Nanette."

"You think he'll let you in?"

"Charlie? I think so. They're very cunning, fellows like that. He said he would hide me in his room."

We discussed it. There was so much—and yet so little that was tangible—to discuss! But I realize now that Alan, with his greater knowledge of what all this might mean, had formed fairly definite plans. To discuss them with me then, was futile. He did not do it.

WE got home to Nanette, and had supper. My own reticence matched Alan's when it came to going into details with Nanette. It

would have led us far afield in fantastic, meaningless theory. But the girl was there, held virtually a prisoner; we wanted to release her. That we told Nanette, but nothing more. It was, indeed, as definite a plan as I could form myself.

It was a hurried supper. Nanette had it ready for us when we came in.

It was eight o'clock when, after hurried preparations, we started. Alan brought his car from the nearby garage. Nanette, with her hair braided and piled upon her head, was ready. We all wore outer coats. The evening was cooling; the sky was overcast.

Alan went into his workshop; came out with a small cloth bag. "Nanette, get your black cloak—I couldn't find it."

"I thought I'd wear this coat and hat, Alan. Don't I look all right?"

Eternal feminine! The subconscious strain under which we were laboring made us laugh.

"Of course you do! We're not going to the opera! I want your cloak—for something else."

She went and got it. The car was a big sedan. Alan put on the back seat the cloak and his cloth bag—they were tools from the workshop, he had told me briefly when I questioned. We all three sat in front, as was our custom. Alan drove.

I recall as we left the apartment that I vaguely gazed ahead those few hours to when we would return. The futility of gazing ahead!

"We've got to hurry," said Alan. "Hope we can catch a ferry, without too long a wait."

He threaded us skillfully south through the crowded city streets. I gazed around. This was New York of 1945. I suddenly felt wholly apart from it.

We just made the ferry. The sky continued overcast. It rained a little, and then stopped. We left the ferry, drove into Staten Island toward Turber's.

"I think I know a secluded place," Alan had told us.

He found it, an unlighted country road. He stopped and switched off the headlights. The darkness leaped at us.

"Where are we?" I demanded.

"A mile from Turber's—not much more. You can see it off there."

We climbed to the road. The sky was solid gray. We were in a lonely neighborhood; a fence was here, bordering a field; but no house was in sight. The road went up a rise here through a cut. Alan had drawn the car to one side; a spreading tree hung over it. Beyond the trees, I could see the lights of a near-by settlement; a trolley car—a lighted roadway winding off there; and the hill with the lights of Turber's. The searchlight was not lighted.

"Hadn't we better get closer, Alan?"

"No, this is all right. It's barely a mile."

"You know where we are? You'll be able to find us, coming back?"

"Yes. Just keep your lights out and wait."

"How long, Alan?" Anxiety flooded me. "If you don't come back—say by midnight—what shall I do?"

"I will come back. You just wait, Ed."

He kissed Nanette. I sat at the wheel with her beside me. Alan's figure, carrying his small bag and the black cloak, showed dimly down the road for a moment, then was gone.

It was nine forty. With all the lights of the car extinguished, we sat in the darkness, waiting. Alan had

taken a small revolver, and I had one also.

TEN o'clock. A distant bell marked it; I snapped on the dash light to verify it. Nanette felt me move.

"What is it, Ed?"

"Nothing. I was looking at the time."

"Ten o'clock?"

"Yes."

We fell silent. Alan would be at the gate of Turber's by now. But what reliance could we place upon that boy Charlie's word for what he would do? Perhaps he had no key to the tennis court gate at all. Or even if he had, he would forget to come. Or Turber would see him and stop him. Or worse, follow him and trap Alan. A thousand doubts and fears for Alan's safety rose to beset me.

Ten thirty. Eleven o'clock. What was Alan doing now? But I told myself: "This is 1945—not the dark ages of the past. This is civilized New York." If Turber caught Alan prowling on the premises, what of it? He wouldn't dare murder Alan. Or would he?

Waiting is a difficult thing to do. The mind grows too active. I began to think that Alan wasn't coming back. Nanette crept against me in the darkness.

"Ed, what time is it?"

"Nearly midnight."

"Ed, I'm so frightened—"

I began to plan what I would do. Wait here until midnight, or one o'clock perhaps. Then drive up to Turber's and boldly ask for Alan. At worst, they would have caught him—arrested him as a marauder. I set my teeth. Why, before morning, if I couldn't locate Alan I'd have all the police of Staten Island up at Turber's looking for him!

"Don't be frighten, Nanette—he'll be back presently."

No one had passed along this road; we seemed wholly secluded. The sky remained overcast; there was not a star showing; off in the distance lightning had flared for a time and we heard the distant thunder, but the storm had now receded. There had been a cool wind, but it died. The night was black and dark. Breathless. And I think it was my apprehension, too, that made me breathless. I sat, with Nanette huddled against me; and stared, straining my eyes in the darkness for Alan's coming.

Midnight passed.

From the roof of the Turber Hospital the searchlight beam abruptly flashed into the sky! It hung motionless.

I told Nanette.

"What does it mean? What could —"

"I don't know."

We sat tense, every faculty alert. Nanette, with sharpened fancy and a hearing always keener than normal, cried out suddenly:

"There was a shot! Listen! There's another!"

I seemed, myself, to hear the sound of distant shots. At Turber's?

"An automobile tire blowing out," I said. "Or a car back-firing."

But she insisted: "I thought I heard screams—some one screaming—"

"Nonsense!"

Another interval. The searchlight off there hung steady.

"Ed, what is that? Don't you hear?"

I heard nothing; but Nanette did, quite evidently.

"Someone coming! Can't you hear them?"

Then I heard it. Running, approaching footsteps, clattering faintly in the darkness on the stony road!

ALAN crept up to the Turber place. He heard the clock chime ten. An Italian settlement lay in a fringe along the east side of the hospital grounds. The main gateway was there. Alan skirted to the west. A cemetery lay on the west slope of the hill, with a narrow road like a trail bordering the high iron fence. It was all dark along here; but Alan remembered that the tennis courts were in this far corner. According to Charlie there should be a small gate somewhere here in the fence.

Would Charlie keep his word? Alan, in talking to me, had seemed confident. But he was hardly that. Everything that Charlie had said might be the wanderings of an unhinged mind; the boy might have forgotten it all by now.

Abruptly Alan came to a small iron door in the fence. A dark figure stood behind it.

"Charlie?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Let me in."

The door swung inward. Alan slipped through; closed it carefully.

"Where's the key, Charlie?"

"Here."

"You keep it. We'll leave this unlocked—when I'm gone you can lock it after me."

"Yes."

Alan could just make out Charlie's figure at the edge of the tennis court.

"No trouble getting out here, Charlie?"

"No."

"Nobody saw you? Sure?"

"Nobody. I'm supposed to be in

bed. I was, but I got up—look how I'm dressed."

He moved to where a yellow glint from a lighted window of the nearby building fell upon him. He wore a long dark dressing gown.

"And my brown tennis shoes, see? Dark clothes for dark deeds at night!"

Alan seized him. "Come out of that light! Shall we go to your room first? Wait for the place to get to sleep?"

"Yes. I can get you there. A side door—I know where it is."

They started, along the edge of the court, then under the shadowy trees of the lawn.

"Won't they lock the side door at night, Charlie?"

"They did, already. It's a spring lock—I opened it from the inside and left it unlatched."

There seemed, even at this early hour, few lights about the building.

"Almost all in bed," Charlie whispered. "All but the doc. He never goes to bed."

Charlie knew where the girl's room was. The Indian was on guard there across the hall. But Alan felt that there was no reason why the girl's door should be watched too closely. They could not anticipate any one's trying to get her out. That Indian would relax by midnight; probably would go to sleep in his own room, with his hall door open so that he could hear if the girl made any disturbance.

Charlie and Alan came to a small entryway at the ground level.

"Are the halls empty?"

"Yes. Nobody will see us. They're dark, too, at night. If you want to go to my room first—"

"I do."

There was a dim night light in this small inside hallway. It showed

Charlie with rumpled hair, white face and gleaming eyes. He was shaking with excitement.

"Come on. What's that you're carrying?" the boy asked.

Alan wore black rubber-soled shoes; his long, lightweight dark overcoat and a dark cap. The bag was under his arm. In his overcoat pocket he had the small revolver.

"Tools, Charlie. To open the door of the girl's room—later, when that Indian gets to sleep—"

The bag contained a chisel, a screw-driver and other implements with which he might force a lock. And a vial of chloroform and a sponge.

THEY crept along the hallway, into the main lower corridor. Alan feared that at any moment they would be discovered. He would make a dash to get out the way they had come in—

"Here! Come in here." Charlie twitched him suddenly by the arm. Through an archway, and Alan found himself in a familiar room—the reception room. It was unlighted. Its furniture showed dimly in the light from the corridor. Like shadows they slid into the recess behind the portieres of the windows.

"What is it, Charlie? Some one coming?"

"No. I want to show you—outside here. Big things afoot here tonight—dark deeds of mystery. I know—I've seen them!"

They cautiously raised one of the shades a trifle. Alan saw that the main courtyard was dark and silent. The single door of the laboratory building was closed.

"What, Charlie? Shall we stay here awhile?"

"Yes. Big things going on. You'll see."

"But what? What have you seen?"

"Things you can't see from here. From the roof you can see them because you're higher than those other walls. Shall we go to the roof? I've got the key—that's Bluebeard's key—"

"No. Stay here awhile."

They were comparatively safe, here behind the portieres. Alan was waiting until later, when he could go up to the girl's room.

They crouched at the window. Half an hour passed. An hour. It was getting toward half past eleven. No lights showed now in any of the courtyard windows; it was all dark out there.

Once or twice Alan had heard footsteps in the main corridor outside the reception room. But no one had entered; and for half an hour now there had been no sound of anyone.

Another interval.

"We've been here long enough," Alan decided.

"All right." The boy was shaking again. "It's midnight, isn't it? The very witching time of night when churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on—"

"Charlie, stop that!"

"It's Hamlet. I'm like Hamlet—a little mad, but though they fool me to the top of my bent they cannot play upon me!"

"Stop it! Let's go upstairs now."

"Shall we? All right. Go where?"

"To the girl's room. Can you lead me there?"

"Yes. But she isn't there!"

"What?" It electrified Alan. "Not there!" He gripped Charlie. "What do you mean?"

"Don't! You hurt!" The lad jerked away.

"Sorry, Charlie! But hush, you make too much noise!"

"All right. But you hurt me. The girl isn't up there."

"Why in Heaven's name didn't you say so long ago? Where is she?"

CHARLIE gestured to the window. "Over there—in the laboratory. They took her over there—just before I went to let you in."

"They? Who?"

"The doc. And the Indian. That's Uncas, as we call him. Uncas was a Mohican—you know that."

"There are they now?" Alan's heart sank. This changed his plans wholly. Was it true?

"They? Who? The girl? She's over there now. They locked her in over there—then they came back."

"Where? When was this?"

"About ten o'clock. I saw them start over here from the laboratory, but then it was time for me to go and let you in."

"They came over here—to the main building?"

"Yes. They're in the doc's rooms, I guess. They're getting ready for something. You'll see. That's what I've been waiting for—they'll be going back over to the laboratory soon."

Alan felt that it was true. There were many things which Charlie had said that fitted into Alan's own beliefs.

"Charlie, can you get us down there?"

"In the courtyard? Yes. Sure I can. Two or three ways. This isn't a jail—you can go where you like if you know the way. I've been almost everywhere, and nobody ever caught me."

They slipped into the dim corridor.

A flight of stairs was near at hand. The lower story was wholly dark. Charlie found a cross hall and opened a door.

They were on the courtyard pavement. Near by an end of the inner building was visible as a dark outline; they moved noiselessly across the open space and crouched against the brick wall of the laboratory.

"How far are we from the door, Charlie?"

"Not far. There's a wheelbarrow there somebody left this afternoon. Let's hide by it."

They came upon the wheelbarrow. It was standing up against the laboratory wall. Its shelter was hardly necessary; the yard here was solid black.

"Where's the door?" Alan whispered.

"Right here. What you going to do?"

ALAN stood at the door. His fumbling hands felt of it. There was no knob; an iron door, set in a brick and iron casement. His fingers felt a lock, sunk in the metal of the door.

Alan laid his bag at his feet. No chance of forcing this lock. Turber and the Indian would doubtless be coming presently. Whatever Alan could do must be done now.

In the solid darkness at his elbow, Charlie's voice whispered again: "What you going to do?"

Alan acted wholly upon impulse. He thought that the girl was inside, alone. She might be able to help—

He knocked, very softly on the door.

"What you—" Charlie began.

"Sh!"

He knocked again.

It happened unexpectedly; yet Alan by instinct was ready for it.

The door abruptly opened!

It swung, just a few inches; a guttural voice sounded, speaking unintelligible words!

Whatever surprise it was to Alan, the Indian within was undoubtedly far more surprised. Alan stuck his foot into the door opening; he shoved violently with his powerful body, his shoulder against the door. It yielded; opened wide with a rush, knocking the Indian backward.

Alan burst into the room. The Indian, unarmed, recovered his balance to find himself staring at Alan's leveled revolver.

"Don't you move! Put your hands up!"

Behind him, Charlie yelped shrilly: "He can't understand English! He's a Mohican!"

But Alan's menace was enough; the fellow backed against the wall. His hands went up.

"You've got him! You've got him!"

"Charlie, shut up!"

A confusion of swift impressions surged upon Alan. A small, bare room with a vague glow of light. The girl was here! She stood near the Indian. Frightened, shrinking against the wall; but she saw Alan, recognized him. She took a step forward.

Charlie was making too much noise. The door through which Alan had burst was open. If Turber saw the glow of light—or heard Charlie's voice—or if any one else heard this uproar—

A confusion of instantaneous impressions.

"Charlie, shut up! You'll have the whole place aroused! Take the girl out—she'll go with you! Grab her arm—we'll make a run for it."

The girl understood. If not Alan's words, at least his swift gestures. She

moved toward Charlie. Alan backed, his weapon leveled upon the Indian. "Go on! Run, Charlie! Get her out at once! I'll follow. Get us to the tennis court."

Alan backed, with the two of them behind him. He had been in that room certainly not over thirty seconds. He left it with Turber's secret laid bare to him! The room had an archway, opening inward. Alan had stood facing it. Charlie had seen it and yelped with excitement.

In the inner court stood a large gray-white vehicle—a cabin airplane. A spread of canvas for a concealing roof was over it. A vehicle for traveling through Time—like the Time-traveling tower we had seen in Central Park!

CHAPTER V

THE FLIGHT IN CENTRAL PARK

ALAN found himself outside the laboratory. Its door was open, with a yellow glow streaming out. Charlie, clinging to the girl, was with him. The glow fell on them; Alan shoved them aside.

"Which way, Charlie? We've got to get out of here!"

They stood in the darkness a moment against the laboratory wall. The hospital was aroused. A voice had shouted. Others were taking it up. Lights were showing in several of the windows. An uproar—growing now of its own momentum. Some one lighted a light in the reception room. A shade snapped up.

The courtyard was brightening with yellow glints of light. No one as yet seemed to notice the three figures standing by the wall.

"Which way, Charlie?" Alan was

momentarily confused. They would have to pass through the lower part of the building, get into the garden, fight their way through if necessary.

The girl stood docile: Charlie was chattering with fright. A desperation was on Alan; he shoved at Charlie. "Come on!"

But he stopped abruptly. The Indian had come to the laboratory door. He shouted—vehement, guttural words. An answer came. Dr. Turber! The man appeared in the light of a lower doorway in the main building.

All thought of flight was momentarily stricken from Alan's mind. "Charlie, wait!" They were standing by the upright wheelbarrow. "Look!"

Turber came running. The shaft of light from the doorway picked out his running figure. He was heading for the laboratory door. Not to menace these intruders; knowing only that his secret was discovered. With his hospital in uproar around him, Turber was in flight.

The Indian disappeared back into the room; Turber went at a full run through its doorway. Alan had not thought to try and stop him. Instead, he moved to the door, fascinated.

The room already was empty; Turber had gone through it; was leaping into the vehicle of the inner courtyard. An instant. Then the huge aero—it was nearly a hundred feet long—with all its gray solidity, began melting. Dissolving. A wraith of a cabin with wings—a dissipating phantom—

The inner courtyard was empty!

Charlie's voice: "Look! There it is! There it is!"

From the top of the laboratory building—perhaps automatically operated by the going of the aero—the

searchlight beam was standing up into the air!

Alan found his wits. "Charlie, for God's sake lead us out of here! You don't want to get caught in this affair."

Figures were now in the courtyard; voices, questioning; at a window of the first story a boy in white nightclothes stood gazing down. The excitement set him screaming—shrill, piercing, unearthly screams! Voices began shouting at him.

It was a welcome diversion. Alan gripped the girl by the arm. She seemed to understand what was going on. She ran with Alan as they followed Charlie across the courtyard, into a lower doorway. In a corridor a man opposed them. He ducked away from Alan's waving weapon.

Through a dim room, crowded with the silent machinery of a laundry. Through another door. A hall. At the foot of a staircase two nurses in dressing gowns saw the running figures and screamed.

Charlie fumbled at a door; opened it. They were in the side garden.

"Which way?" Alan demanded. "You go back! Nobody recognized you? Pretend you had nothing to do with it."

"This way! There's the tennis court—to fight and run away—live again to fight—"

There were people in the outer grounds now. The presence of intruders was recognized. A voice called, "Which way did they go?" One of the inmates began screaming again. Some one fired a revolver—several shots into the air to arouse the neighborhood.

At the little gate Alan paused. "Lock it after us! Throw the key away! Don't let them find it on

you! Thanks, Charlie—you're a brick. Say nothing—know nothing."

"All right, I won't." He touched the girl. "Good-by—the maiden fair is gone!"

"Yes, Charlie. Thanks for what you did—we won't forget you—"

The gate thumped closed. Its lock turned. Charlie whirled and vanished in the shadows of the trees.

THE girl clung to Alan's hand and ran swiftly, lightly as a fawn, beside him. The uproar at the hospital faded into the distance.

Within ten minutes, running through the darkness over the stony road, Alan and the girl were at our car.

We bundled the girl into the back seat. Nanette sat with her. "Wrap her in the cloak, Nanette! Is it there?"

"Yes."

"Move over, Ed," Alan said. "I'll drive."

In the silence other shots sounded off at Turber's. Alan hastily backed the car and turned it.

"Raising hell up there! But I got her!"

We sped away into the night.

The thing was clear to us now. This girl had come in a Time-traveling tower from the Past—or the Future. Turber also possessed a Time-vehicle; one more effective than the tower, since it seemed a vehicle also capable of traveling through Space. This girl undoubtedly knew Turber in some other Time-world. And feared him—just as Nanette feared him.

With purring motor we were speeding along one of the island's highways, almost deserted at this hour of the night.

"Which way you going, Alan? Not to the ferry?"

"No. West, over the bridge into Jersey. Get back to New York that way. We're safe enough."

"What are you going to do with the girl?" I asked.

He hardly knew. "Take her home, I guess. See if we can't learn to understand her. She's intelligent—she speaks some kind of language."

We sped through a quiet, sleeping village. It was a long drive, around this way through Jersey. The night was well advanced toward the new dawn when we were again in Manhattan.

We had stopped once on a lonely Jersey road. Stopped by Nanette's voice.

"Alan! She's trying to talk to me!"

We drew down the car curtains; lighted the tiny dome light. The girl was much smaller than Nanette; she sat, with her blue robe crushed about her, enveloped in Nanette's long cloak. She was smiling, gesturing.

"She's beautiful, Alan. She's been talking—I can't understand."

Her voice was soft; queer liquid syllables, queerly intoned. A voice like music; the wind in harp strings, stirring them to murmur—but it meant nothing intelligible to us.

But there were gestures.

I said: "She understands! She's trying to show us she understands—"

Nanette demanded: "Is she looking at me? Look, dear—I'm Nanette—understand? Oh, you can see—and if you can see, you must understand! I'm Nanette." She laid her hand on her own breast. "Can you say it? Nanette—"

The girl said, quite clearly, "Nanette!" And laughed with a low ripple of pleasure. "Nanette! Lea! Nan-

nette! Lea!" She was indicating herself. "Lea!"

"Her name is Lea! Yes, dear, we understand you."

I murmured: "And at Bellevue—"

With quick hearing she caught the word. "Bellevue," she said. She had evidently learned it while there. "Bellevue." She repeated it, frowning. She made a gesture, meaningless, and sank back, huddled against Nanette.

Alan switched off the dome light. "We'd better get started—some one might see us." He drove on. "Keep on trying, Nanette."

We decided to take her to Alan and Nanette's apartment. The Turber staff at the hospital would report that Turber and his assistant and the girl suffering from amnesia had vanished. What else could they say? Charlie probably would not talk; and Alan doubted if himself or Charlie had been recognized. Our connection with the mysterious midnight disturbance at Turber's might never be established.

WE were in the quiet, mid-town streets of New York when Nanette called us again.

"She understands the word 'tower'! She just said it. Lea, what do you mean? Try! Say something else to Nanette!"

Lea was murmuring: "Tower! Tower!" She seemed trying to look out of the side window. I leaned back and drew up the shade.

"That all right, Alan?"

"Yes. What does she want to do?"

She was peering through the window. We went on a few blocks in silence. Alan said nothing. But he had told me he intended crossing Forty-Second Street to the East Side. He did not. He went north to Fifty-

Ninth. Then turned east. Soon we were passing along the southern edge of Central Park.

Lea had been peering intently. She recognized the park. She murmured: "Tower! Tower!" Insistently. She even turned and plucked at Alan's shoulder. "Tower! Tower!"

Understanding swept me. "Alan, she—"

"Yes. Wait, Ed! Don't say anything—just watch her."

He silenced Nanette's questions. We turned up Fifth Avenue. The dark, tree-dotted park was on our left. Nanette sat quiet, trying to fathom the sudden tenseness which had come to us. Lea stared through her window at the park. Intent. Motionless.

We came into sight of the Metropolitan Museum a few blocks ahead. Alan slowed the car.

"Lea—"

She turned at the sound of her name. She smiled; gestured at the park; reached toward the door of the car.

I exclaimed: "She recognizes it, Alan! She wants to get out. What are you doing?"

He had turned into the cross-street. "Stop here. See what she wants to do."

We opened the car door. I stood at the curb. This cross-street was dim and deserted.

"Lea." She turned again as Alan spoke. She smiled and gestured again toward the park. And pulled at Nanette.

"What is it, Lea, dear?"

"She wants you to get out, Nanette."

"Shall I, Alan?"

"Yes. Help her, Ed."

I guided Nanette. Lea plucked at Alan. He put the lights of the car

out and locked it. His fingers were trembling.

"You walk with Lea, Nanette. Let her guide you. We'll follow. See what she wants to do."

Four of us; unnoticed by the great, sleeping city, all unaware of us. And what would it have cared?

We crossed the avenue; plunged into the shadows of the park. To the east the leaden sky over the housetops was brightening with the coming dawn.

We crouched in the shrubbery by the edge of a path. Trees were over us; a lake near by; a winding park roadway off there with lights along it; the shadowy building of the Museum at the edge of the park was in the distance.

Lea had marked well this landscape! It was familiar to her, as it was to Alan and me, who had been here so often, and had seen the vision of it on the screen last night. This open spread of lawn here, with the lake near it, this path bordering it.

My mind swung back. A forest glade was here, three hundred years ago. Three thousand years ago, what? A virgin forest? And three hundred thousand years ago? Primitive man, hiding here—as we of 1945 now were crouching?

This same Space; the spread of this lawn in Central Park—what would it be in another hundred years? Or a thousand? This little Space, from the Beginning to the End so crowded with events and only Time to hold them separate!

LEA was in advance of us. I whispered to Alan. "That tower we saw here—coming again?"

"Of course! Don't you think so? She's waiting for it—expects it."

This empty lawn—no! Not empty! The tower materialized all in an

instant. It stood gray and silent. We were on our feet—Alan and Nanette off to one side.

The tower doorway opened. The young man stood there with the light behind him. Stood gazing—

No vision this! Reality! Empty space, two moments ago. Then a phantom, a moment ago. But a real tower, now! Solid. As real, as existent—now—as these rocks, these trees!

Suddenly, even nearer at hand, another shape materialized. The Turber vehicle! It came from nothing into visibility. It settled like a giant airship upon the lawn. Its door opened. Figures sprang out.

There was a moment when we were all too surprised to move. Lea gave a cry. The young man from the tower rushed toward us. From the Turber aero three men came running. They were no more than twenty feet away.

"Ed! Run!" I became aware that Alan had turned to run with Nanette. She stumbled, fell, and before he could pick her up they were caught.

I leaped for them. It was Turber; and his Indian; and a huge, half-naked man in an animal skin. He swung a stone ax. Alan was fighting; he fired his revolver, but missed. The ax struck him; he went down, but he was not badly hurt, for from one knee he fired again. The giant with the ax swayed and dropped to the grass.

I leaped for Turber. Another man came running from the aero. Turber was holding Nanette; he flung his coat over her to stifle her screams. I did not dare fire. I launched into them. From behind something struck me. I dropped; but I recall that I was still struggling—gripping Turber's legs, but he kicked me off. Then some one leaped on me; struck me

again. I fell insensible.

Alan was again on his feet. Turber was carrying Nanette away. Alan dared not fire at them; he swayed on his feet, trying to run after them. He saw the Indian strike me. And then the Indian whirled. Incredibly swift. Alan was hurt. The dim park swayed before him. He saw Lea and the young man from the tower standing together. Both seemed unarmed. They stood horrified, undecided what to do.

Alan, reeling dizzily, was no match for the Mohican. He blindly fired his revolver; but he missed. The Indian's tomahawk caught him a glancing blow on the head.

He must have recovered consciousness in a moment. Lea and the young man were bending over him. The aero was gone, taking Nanette and me with it.

Alan was not badly hurt. He sat up, then he stood. Lea urged him toward the tower. But he resisted her. And then she used force. The youth with her seized Alan. He was too weak and shaken to withstand them. They hurried him to the tower. He saw upon the grass the motionless body of the giant, with a primitive stone ax lying beside it.

The tower door closed after him. Leo sat him in a chair; the young man went to a table of instruments.

Alan felt a flash, a reeling of all his senses and of all the world.

CHAPTER VI

FIVE THOUSAND YEARS INTO THE FUTURE

ALAN did not lose consciousness. But it was a terrible sensation of falling; a soundless, clattering chaos. The room

seemed going dim; glowing silver-bright, with every smallest detail sharp and clear—and then fading. There was the sense that his body was suddenly spectral, with a lightness of thistledown, whirling away in all this soundless confusion.

The sensations were momentary; the room presently was almost normal again. Alan sat still and gazed around him. A solid, white metal floor; gray-white metal walls; a metal ceiling, windows and doors, all closed. A solid room, unmoving—standing in the bottom of a tower planted solidly upon the ground. It felt like that. Almost normal. But not quite. For under his feet Alan could feel the floor vibrating. A whirring, infinitely tiny, infinitely rapid vibration. It thrilled up into his body like a gentle current; it gave him a sense of lightness, buoyancy.

Alan knew that the tower was traveling in Time. Into our Past, or our Future he could not tell which. Across the room at a table of instruments Lea and the young man sat gazing at a bank of whirring dials. They talked together in low tones; words unintelligible to Alan. Lea, glancing over, caught his gaze and smiled. He stood up; stood trembling and dizzy. At once she came and took his arm.

"Let me see the dials," he said. He knew she could not understand the words, but he gestured, and she understood and steadied him to a seat by the table.

"San," she said, and pointed to her companion.

The young man smiled, and offered his hand in the fashion of Alan's time. He was a trifle taller than Lea; similar of aspect—a gentle-looking youth, but with strongly masculine features. Blue eyes, like Lea's,

brown hair, long to his neck; a robe of fabric, dark-blue, in form not unlike hers. It revealed his delicately molded limbs. A very gentle, handsome young fellow, but there was nothing girlish, nothing effeminate about him. He stood up with a quiet dignity—almost an unconscious aspect of superiority, as though he were a gracious little prince, shook hands with Alan, and sat again at his dials.

Alan surmised he was Lea's brother. Certainly they looked alike. Alan made them understand that he wanted to read the dials. Most of the dials were unintelligible, but there was one, with a slowly moving pointer, which Alan could read. It marked 1980 A. D. Into the future! Alan cursed the fact that he could not talk to his two companions. His mind leaped back to Nanette and to me. Captured by Turber. Taken—where? He did not know. But one thing was clear, Lea and this San were friendly to him. They had forced him into the tower because they knew it was the best thing for him. They were taking him now—ahead, into what we call the Future. Doubtless to their own Time-world.

Alan believed it must be far into the future—a time when English was lost and forgotten, a dead language of history. But once there, Alan thought that they would have a way of communicating with him. Their smiles were reassuring. Lea examined his head and shoulder wounds. They were no more than severe bruises.

"Nothing," said Alan. "I'm all right. But Nanette?" He tried to gesture to make it mean something.

"Nanette," said Lea. She smiled again, but then her face went solemn.

San said abruptly: "Lea—San—

Alan." His gesture included the three of them. And then he pointed to the dial. Alan understood. He was indicating the year to which they were going.

It was the year 7012 A. D.

"But Nanette," Alan insisted. "Nanette? Turber?" He swung his finger over the dial. But they both shook their heads. They were solemn, perturbed. They did not know Turber's destination. Alan's heart sank, yet there was nothing he could do but wait.

PRESENTLY Lea was showing him about the tower room. It was some thirty feet square, occupying the entire base of the tower. There was furniture which seemed to be of metal. A gray-white room, windows closed now and covered by opaque metal plates, a dim glow of light, the source of which he could not determine, lighted all this gray interior.

Two small sections of the room were divided off by hangings of what might have been a gray metallic fabric—one inclosure where it seemed food was stored; the other, an instrument room. A low hum came from there. Alan saw lines of tiny wires of cobweb fineness, which began there and spread like a tiny white network woven into the walls and ceiling and floor of the room. And, in one corner, there was a small metal staircase—an incline spiraling upward through a trapdoor of the ceiling. Lea gestured.

"Want us to go up?" said Alan.

She evidently did. She showed him the dials again. They were passing the year 1995. She spoke to San. He remained at the instruments; Alan and Lea went up into the tower.

Amazing sight! They stood on the narrow balcony which girdled the

small tower room near its top. Alan had not dared to look down as they climbed the ladder. It seemed that around him was a gray, luminous fog. On the balcony he clung to the breast-high railing and stared.

A gray monochrome of city—blended colors of whirling days and nights, seasons, years—all blended into this flat, shadowless gray. A blurred scene, crawling with movement. Melting outlines, changing with the progressive altered aspect of the passing years.

1995! 2000! Our great city of 1945, here just a few moments ago, now seemed so small and antiquated! What a tremendous giant, rearing itself here now around him! And it was still growing. Its great buildings had come up and were encroaching upon the park. They loomed far higher than the tower.

He saw, off where Broadway traversed its diagonal path, a roof appear over the street. A great shadowy spread of roof—over Broadway—then over other streets. Growing giant of a city. The outlines of the huge buildings came nearer. The park was dwindling as the city flowed over it. Structures which Alan fancied might be great airplane stages rose high on stilted tower legs. One was quite near. It came up all in an instant—twice the tower's height, with an enormous platform upon its top. Once, for just an instant, Alan fancied he saw the shape of an airliner resting there. A thing which, because it persisted long enough for him to see it, must have been lying there for many months.

The city seemed a single solid structure now—a vast building of tumbled, storied wings, and walls, towers and spires. A city, roofed over. The roof was over the tower now. The buildings had long since

flowed over the park. No trees here now. No sky; no light from nature. The persisting man-made lights now were visible, blurred spots of dull yellow-red glow. It seemed suddenly a city infernal. Teeming multitudes here under one vast roof. Spider-like aerial bridges and viaducts were everywhere.

The tower presently was set in the space of a street. Alan could see very little of the city's extent—a street of many pedestrian levels one above the other, flanked with great lights.

The street had come into being, risen around the tower—endured for a moment. And then, as though leprous, it began dismembering. A portion of it melting away; then another. But other buildings—other viaducts—other towers rose to fill up the gaps. And always larger structures.

THE tower now seemed traveling faster. Alan could imagine the city—this one vast roof with the rivers flowing beneath it. Staten Island with the space of Turber's hospital, was doubtless under this same roof. And all the upper bay; and the New Jersey shore of the Hudson; and Brooklyn and all this end of Long Island.

Incredible millions of people, living here in this enormous, monstrous beehive—living pallid; some of them perhaps, in the poverty-stricken sections, never having seen the moon save as its light might struggle through their translucent roof; not knowing the sunlight rays; never having seen the sea, with only gloomy rivers flowing through tunnels to represent it; wondering, perchance, what grass might be, and things that people richer and more traveled spoke of as trees. Pallid people of

the monstrous city, slaves to their own machinery!

Alan clung to the balcony rail, with Lea beside him. Her hand was on his arm as though to steady him. Occasionally she met his glance and smiled; or gestured to indicate the gray shifting wonders of the scene around them.

Alan noticed now that in this constricted area where the tower was set, there seemed few changes. These vast structures, of a material the engineers of this age may fatuously have termed indestructible, were enduring over larger periods. They melted away occasionally and others took their places. But the form was about the same.

As though now mankind here were resting. The peak of civilization here, and perhaps upon all the earth, was reached. Man resting upon the summit of his achievements. But in nature there is no rest! A thousand years, here upon civilization's summit. And then—a little step backward! Mankind, softened by ceasing to advance, turning decadent. A little backward step.

As though this city here were a symbol of it, Alan could see the decline. A rift in the street—and it was not rebuilt. Another rift. A leprous slash—a hole that gave Alan a wide extent of vista to the east.

Doubtless, upon an earth so unified by transportation as this age must have been, it was not only New York decaying—but also a decadence of all mankind over all the world. Alan saw it here. By what might have been the year 5000 A. D., the shadows of the vast city lay in ruins around the tower. Broken buildings, crumbling visibly as Alan stared at them. Fallen roof—the whole ramified and multifarious structure everywhere lowering as nature pulled it

down. It lay piled in shadowy mangled fragments.

There were trees now! Vegetation springing up. A wild, neglected growth. A forest growing in the ruins of the city, where the occasional broken spires still stood like headstones; and then melted down.

The forest grew around the tower; the city was almost buried. Lea plucked at Alan. She murmured something.

"Shall we go down?" he said.

She smiled. She said, quite distinctly, "Yes."

She led him down the ladder. He felt more secure now. There was no sense of movement of the tower; the ladder steps were firm and solid. Alan saw the forest melting. A sylvan landscape seemed coming.

In the lower tower room they found San still intent upon his dials. He drew Alan over and indicated that single dial which to Alan was legible. It marked 6650 A. D. The pointer was traveling much faster than when Alan had seen it before; but as he watched it now he could see that it was slackening. He sat regarding it; listening to the musical, unintelligible words of his two companions.

Then they gave him food and drink. And Lea again examined his bruised shoulder and the gash on his head. But they were not serious; he had forgotten them.

6700 A. D. 6800 A. D. The tower's flight was slowing; the hum of the room seemed progressively at a lower pitch. They were nearing their destination; preparing to stop in 7012.

ALAN'S mind again went to Nanette and me. Where were we in all these whirling years? A sense of loneliness, depression swept him. He felt utterly baffled, helpless. But he tried to shake it off. He said

aloud, as though to cheer himself:

"Lea—see here—I've got to talk to you. Understand?" It seemed almost that she did. "My sister, Nanette—that villain Turber has her—he's always wanted her, understand? I've got to get her back, Lea. Damn it, I've got to find him—get her away from him!"

But all Lea could do was touch him sympathetically.

Baffled. This cursed barrier of language! "Lea, what is Turber to you?"

San, with readier wit, pointed again to the dial. Indicated 7012, and then gestured to his lips.

Alan nodded. "Yes, I understand—when we get there we can talk."

They came to the year 7000. Traveling slowly now.

Then Lea had an idea. In the automobile, coming from Staten Island, she had been wrapped in Nanette's cloak. It was discarded now; but it lay here in the tower room. She picked it up and stood before Alan. Fragile, beautiful little creature! The soft folds of the sky-blue drapery fell about her figure; the golden tresses lay in a mass over her shoulders. Her eyes, clear pale blue as a morning sky, were fixed on Alan. A wave of emotion swept him; it seemed that he had never seen a girl so beautiful.

"Nanette," she said, lifting the cloak.

"Yes," he responded. "Nanette's cloak. I understand. But what—"

She took Alan's finger and moved it over the dial. Aimlessly. She said: "Nanette—Turber—Edward—"

And shook her head. She did not know where we were. But then she indicated the cloak again, and smiled, and said, "Yes—yes."

What could she mean by that? Was she trying to convey that with Nanette's cloak they would be able to

learn where Nanette was? It seemed so.

A tenseness had come to San. He was alert at his mechanisms. He spoke sharply to Lea. Her hand went to Alan, steadying him. Alan braced himself. San flung a switch-lever. The tower seemed almost to lurch physically.

They had reached their destination. Alan's senses had suddenly reeled; but they cleared at once. The tower room was vibrationless; the hum was stilled. San opened the door. A warm sunlight streamed in.

The Space of Central Park, five thousand years in our future!

Lea and San led Alan from the tower.

CHAPTER VII

OATH OF VENGEANCE

THEY went down a flight of stone steps to the ground. Alan found that the tower now was set in the midst of a garden of gloriously vivid blossoms. The air was redolent with their perfume. A brook of sunlit water flowed near by. There were cool bushes and shade trees, green and brown; cool green lawns of sward; little winding paths.

A garden of a few acres. It was all inclosed by a wall of masonry—a wall some twenty or thirty feet high, looped and turreted. The figure of a man was on the top of the wall, over a gateway fairly near at hand. As they stepped from the tower his arm went up with a gesture of recognition.

Realization swept Alan. This garden, this wall, this pacing sentry—all this we had seen on the television. We had witnessed then the tower's departure; by some vagary of Nature's laws the etheric waves carry-

ing this image had come to us of 1945.

They passed through the gateway of the wall. The guard on its top called down something; and stared at Alan curiously as they passed through.

Beyond the wall a sylvan landscape was spread to Alan's gaze. The Space of Manhattan Island. He could still recognize it. A river behind him. Another river ahead a mile or so. The Hudson shimmering in its valley. He could see the cliffs of its further bank.

Near at hand the open country was dotted with trees, checkered with round patches of cultivated fields. There were figures working in the fields. And occasional habitations—low, oval houses of green thatch.

A road of dull smooth white wound from this gateway over the countryside toward the river. Animals, strange of aspect, were slowly dragging carts.

A city was off there, along this nearer bank of the river—a stretch of houses more closely set. City! It seemed some primitive village. All this—primitive; as though here might be some lost Indian tribe of our early ages. The field workers, garbed in vivid colors. Their squat little carts, slow-moving with broad-horned oxen. The quiet village strung along the calm-flowing river. All picturesque and primitive.

But Alan knew it was not barbarism, but decadence. Civilization had reached its summit, and declined. Fallen back, to this.

Lea was in advance of Alan and San. She turned into a small gateway. They passed through a garden profuse with flowers. A low house stood here, half hidden by the verdure. An old man was at the doorway—a stalwart old fellow with a

furious white beard; a shaggy white mane of hair; a robe of sober gray, monklike with its rope about his bulging middle.

He greeted Lea and San with a gesture of affection. He stared open-mouthed at Alan. Lea explained to him swiftly. And then came relief to Alan. This old patriarch spoke what he doubtless called the ancient English. He said slowly, with a meticulous, careful intonation:

"I thank you for saving Lea from Wolf Turber."

"But we've got to locate them," Alan insisted. "How can we? With this cloak? Yes, it belongs to my sister."

"I will take you shortly to my instrument room," said the old man. "I have had Lentz, my assistant, preparing the Time-vision—we cannot do it more quickly."

THEY had talked now for perhaps half an hour—old Powl, as he was called, interpreting for Lea and San. He was their grandfather. It was he who had discovered the secret of this Time-traveling tower. He had built it; and had constructed also a series of instruments which he called Time-vision. He was, in this age of decadence, one of the few living scientists. And he was a language student as well—he had trained himself in many of the dead languages of the past.

"My son," Powl said, "the father of Lea and San took my tower and once stopped in the year you call about 1925. He paused for just a moment, but when he returned here there was found a young man with him. A stowaway, as you would call it. That man was Wolf Turber."

It was all presently clear to Alan. Turber had come here; had stolen the secret of the tower and the Time-

vision, and getting followers had built himself his Time-vehicle—and departed.

"He said he was in love with Lea. But she was afraid of him—his attentions were unwelcome. We told him so."

Like Nanette! "I understand," said Alan bitterly. "My sister—"

"He has her now, you tell me. That is bad. You must get her back. And kill him."

The old man's mild blue eyes suddenly flashed. Lea spoke. He interpreted.

"She says, I must tell you—we have sworn to kill Turber. He murdered my son—father of Lea and San. Stole our platinum treasure—and murdered my son, who was defending it."

Alan thought he had never heard such intensity as came into the old man's voice. "We are careful with our tower—we do nothing evil with it. Turber's vehicle is all for evil. My son died—and there as he died we swore—myself and Lea and San—that some time we would kill Turber and destroy his vehicle."

Lea and San understood what he was saying. They stood beside him, with faces white and solemn. He added: "But there seems little that we can do. There are no weapons here. We have no need in this age for any scientific weapons. I cannot travel in the tower—I am too old to stand the shock. San must always stay with it—to guard it. And so it all falls to Lea. She has passed through the different ages in the tower. There are weapons in the Past, of course. But I have not wanted Lea to stop. And Turber is very powerful, very elusive."

Lea interrupted again. Powl said: "We know that Turber has a stronghold in the year 2445 A. D."

"Five hundred years in the future of my Time-world," said Alan.

"Yes. Your city of New York is then about at its height. Turber is powerful there—impregnable. There is only one other Time in which Turber habitually stops. The year 1945. Lea went there. But it was foolish, we all realize now. As you know—she could accomplish nothing. And but for you, Turber would have had her!"

Again Lea interrupted. Powl translated: "She wants me to say that now she will learn your Ancient English. There are so many dead languages—but she is very quick to learn—when interested."

"Interested?" said Alan. His gaze went to Lea's eager face. A wave of color swept her; but her eyes remained level and she held out her hand. Its touch thrilled Alan. As though the clasp were sealing a compact; unspoken, but he could read her eyes and feel, surprisingly, the sudden answer in his own heart.

San, too, held out his hand. Powl said: "My children find in you a friend—sorely needed." Again the old man's eyes flashed. "We have sworn that Turber will die. He has your sister, and your friend. Your own purpose—"

"To get them back," said Alan. "But where is he? I don't think he will return to 1945. You say he is impregnable in 2445—"

"Yes. But he is not there now. If he stops—in some earlier age, as we hope—then will be your opportunity."

A MAN came to the doorway of the room, spoke to Powl, and disappeared. Powl stood up. He said, with brisk energy:

"The instruments are ready. Turber, we think, is still traveling in

time. We will try, with your sister's cloak, to locate him as soon as he stops anywhere."

They left the house, crossing the gardens toward an outbuilding in which was the instrument room. Alan's mind was tumultuous with his thoughts. This incredible catastrophe into which so unexpectedly he and those he loved had fallen! Alan had always been one to walk alone in life. He made few friends; his friendship for me, his love for Nanette—to these he could now add an emotion, as yet barely understood, his feeling for Lea.

Into this, his world, Turber had suddenly thrust himself, abducting Nanette; capturing, perhaps killing me. What could Alan do about it? Suppose they located the Time-world to which Turber had gone? Alan could go there—with this girl Lea to help him and San to guard the tower. Hopeless adventure! He had one small weapon, his revolver. And a frail girl for companion. There seemed no one else from whom he could get help. No one in this Time-world of Lea's.

His mind roved the possibility of getting help elsewhere. His own world of 1945? Who could he get there to do more than smile incredulously at his fantastic tale? He envisaged all the other centuries. But to go to any one of them for help—for weapons and men—was hardly practical. He would be a stranger; he would fall into a strange civilization with only this same incredible story to aid him. He would be imprisoned perhaps—or, at best, be disregarded as a lunatic.

Lea had faced all this. She had tried it in 1945. It was not feasible. Alan saw now that he would have to depend upon himself. The tower would transport him. The rest lay

with himself, his own wits. He felt that very probably I was dead. He would rescue Nanette from Turber's clutches if he could. For the rest—this oath of vengeance sworn by Lea and her brother against Turber—Alan gritted his teeth; and as he thought of Nanette's gentle beauty and Turber's grinning, satanic visage, he swore to himself a similar oath. He would kill Turber if he could!

"This way," said Powl. "Stoop down—you are so tall for our door openings."

It was a low-vaulted room, dimly illumined. A laboratory crowded with strangely fashioned apparatus. Powl made no attempt at explanation of his devices. Nor was Alan interested, except in one—the Time-vision which might disclose Nanette.

"My assistant," said Powl. "He is called Lentz—he speaks a little of your ancient language."

A man of about thirty rose from a seat before one of the instruments. He offered his hand. Powl added to Alan:

"You may speak openly before Lentz. He is my trusted helper—the only person besides ourselves who knows the secrets of my Time-vision and of the tower."

He was an undersized, heavy-set fellow, garbed in a short robe like San's. His black hair was clipped close on a bullet head. He wore goggles which now were pushed up on his forehead.

"I speak very little," he said as he shook hands. "I am ready if it is you have the cloak."

The tubes of this instrument might have been Neon lamps by their aspect. There were coils; a multiplicity of wires; a tiny series of amplifiers; a system of prisms and mirrors; beams of lights, whirling from tiny

mirrors swiftly rotating. There was a metal tube like a small microscope; a rack beneath it, upon which a dull red light was focused. There were rows of dials—tuning dials, and indicators; and a large fluorescent screen which seemed under electronic bombardment from the rear. The whole apparatus occupied a table some six feet long, with the dials to one side and the screen upright at its end.

LENTZ placed Nanette's cloak upon the rack; he focused the red light upon it; then stood gazing into the eyepiece of the tube as one might gaze into a microscope.

Lea and San stood by Alan. Lea gestured toward the screen; it was empty of image. Then she pointed to one of the dials. Alan saw it bore figures he could understand—figures ranging over thousands of centuries. Some of it B. C.; the rest A. D. There was a point on it marked zero. The indicator stood there at rest.

"Your ancient calendar," said Powl. "With this garment belonging to your sister we may be able to tune our receivers and make connection. The image of her is here in the ether—if we can adjust to it."

Lentz was twirling the tuning knobs. The pointers on all the dials stirred a little; images seemed trying to form on the fluorescent screen.

A minute. Ten minutes. Then Lentz relaxed.

"Not now," he said. "It will not come. Presently we try again."

"They may still be traveling," said Powl. "It would be difficult to get the image—"

They waited; then tried again, but failed. Where was Nanette? Despair flooded Alan. Over all these diversified centuries, how could they ever find her? She seemed so hopelessly

faraway. And yet he realized not far in Space. A few miles from here probably, no more.

"We will never find her," said Lentz.

Alan gazed at him sharply. "You think not?"

"No." The fellow seemed confused under Alan's eyes. "That I mean—I hope so, but it seems not."

"We must keep trying," said Powl. "The other instrument is more sensitive. Have you the tubes for it connected?"

"No," said Lentz.

The tubes were in an adjoining room. Lentz went in to prepare them. The connecting door was open; Alan heard Lentz moving about, and heard presently the hiss and snap of a current as he charged the tubes.

San and Lea sat murmuring together in low tones. They addressed Powl. He listened. He said to Alan:

"Lea wants me to explain—if Turber takes your sister directly to the great city of 2445, still it is not quite hopeless. We think we have located a weapon—a single very powerful weapon—"

The old man's voice lowered. Lea and San bent forward intently. There was a weapon—a projector, Powl called it—which was mentioned in history. It had been built as an historical curiosity. It stood in a museum of Greater New York. The contemporary history of that Time—when weapons of such a kind were long since abandoned—said that this specimen in the museum was in perfect working order. Its operation was described. It was scientifically preserved in the museum against the ravages of time.

Lea and San—traveling in their tower—had seen the Time-world when the city was crumbled into ruins. The museum was abandoned;

there would be no one there to stop Lea if she went and searched in the ruins of the museum for the projector.

Powl was talking very softly. A tenseness was on him.

"This we have told no one."

"What Time-world?" Alan asked.

"We think the best year to try for it would be about 5000 A. D."

It chanced that of the four of them, only Alan was facing the doorway of the connecting room. The sound of Lentz moving about was suddenly stilled. The realization of that struck Alan.

A segment of the other room was visible through the open door; Lentz was not in sight, but it seemed as though a shadow of him lay on the floor near the doorway.

Alan whispered sharply, "Quiet." He leaped to his feet; he darted noiselessly across the room with the startled glances of his companions upon him. Beyond the doorway he came upon Lentz standing close against the wall. A tube was in his hand; he was polishing it with a piece of cloth.

"Oh," said Alan. "I didn't know you were here."

"The instrument will be ready quite shortly." Lentz moved back to his work.

ALAN returned to his seat. He murmured to Powl: "Let's talk about that later—not now."

Lea touched his arm. She whispered: "Yes—yes, understand—not now."

The thing startled them all. There was a brief silence; they could hear Lentz moving normally about the other room.

Alan asked Powl at last: "Can you operate your instrument here? Without Lentz to do it?"

"Lea and San can," said Powl. "Though not so well as Lentz."

"Let's try it again, but wait a minute."

Alan went to the door. "Lentz, how soon will you be ready?"

Lentz looked up from his work. "Quite shortly."

"Good. I'll close this door. Knock when you're ready." He ignored the fellow's surprise, and dropped the door closed with a bang.

"Now," said Alan. "Try it."

With Nanette's cloak again, Lea and San tried the instrument. Almost at once results came. The screen showed an image. A starlit night. A forest glade. Turber's aero lay glistening in the starlight. Figures were moving about the glade. Strangely garbed, burly figures of men; and a group of half-naked, feathered savages stood near by, upon the shore of a river. A canoe lay there. To one side, a camp fire showed its dull yellow light through the forest underbrush.

There was an air of inactivity about the scene. Turber came presently and stood in the cabin doorway of the aero. His familiar hunched figure, with the starlight on him and a yellow-red glow from the camp fire. Turber, waiting here for something!

The dial marked 1664 A. D. Powl was trembling with eagerness. Lea and San snapped off the instrument. San had recognized the location of the scene. It was the Hudson River shore of Manhattan Island, no more than a mile from the tower-space. Powl said hurriedly: "San has the exact reading—the year, month and day. Turber will not expect you, that night there in the forest. If you can creep up on him with your revolver—"

It might be possible, in the gloom

of the forest, to get up to the aero unobserved.

They made a few hurried preparations. San and Lea would not be able to talk with Alan; they made their plans now, with Powl for interpreter. Back at the tower, Powl stood by its steps.

"Good-by. Do your best." He gripped Alan's hand.

The tower door closed upon Alan, Lea and San. A moment, and they had started. The room reeled, but this time Alan was prepared for it. He recovered in a moment. He stood by Lea and smiled. He said: "Not so bad this time."

"No," said Lea. "All right."

There was a sound in the humming, vibrating room. A rustling behind them. From a shadowed corner a figure rose up.

Lentz! His swart face was smiling. He was by the door. He had followed them in. He said to Alan: "I thought better I come, so I can talk for you and them. We must plan carefully what we do. I want to help you."

CHAPTER VIII

UNFATHOMABLE SCOUNDREL

I MUST go back now to that time at dawn in Central Park, when we were set upon by Turber and his men. I recall that something struck me and I fell. Turber was holding Nanette. I caught him by the legs as I went down, but he kicked me off. Then I was struck again and everything went black.

When I recovered consciousness I was lying on a bunk in a small cabin of Turber's aero. I seemed not greatly hurt. I sat up, wholly confused at first; then lay down again, listening

to the hum of the room, feeling the metal bunk vibrating beneath me.

My head was roaring; my hair was matted with blood from a ragged scalp wound, and I was sore and bruised all over. But I lay and felt my strength coming back.

I was alone in the tiny cabin. It was not much more than twice the size of the bed. There was a vague silver glow in it; I could see a small window with a transparent pane. And a door. The door stood ajar.

I got to the floor on my feet and stood swaying dizzily. I felt queerly light-headed—as though I were about to float away. My revolver was gone; so were my overcoat and hat and outer jacket.

I lurched to the window. The aero seemed poised a hundred feet or so above the ground. I gazed, incredulous, at a blurred, shifting, melting landscape.

The aero was traveling in Time. But I recall that in my confusion, only half conscious, I could not realize what this might mean. And suddenly I was faint. I tumbled back onto the cot. I fainted—or drifted away into sleep.

I was awakened by a sound near me. I sat up abruptly, this time fully conscious and clear-headed. Turber stood in the cabin regarding me.

"Well, you've come to yourself at last?"

I sank back on one elbow. "Yes. What are you doing to me?" I gulped with a sudden thought. "Where is—where's Nanette?"

"So you're worried about her? Be consoled—she's worried about you. And she has cause."

He stood toying with his ribbon, dangling his glasses. He was dressed as I had seen him at the hospital. He regarded me sardonically.

"You're alive—let that suffice."

I moved to get up, but he waved me back. "Don't bother. You will annoy us if you come out. Are you hungry?"

"No," I said.

"Nanette and I will be breakfasting presently."

I added, "I am hungry."

That amused him. My mind was active now—fully alert. I asked: "We're traveling in Time, aren't we? Where are we going? What do you want with Nanette and me? This is all very strange."

I was trying to gauge him. I managed a smile, as though my situation were annoying, but nothing more. "Shall I come out and have something to eat with you?"

His smile broadened. Satanic scoundrel. Inscrutable. He said:

"Yes. I'll call you." And then his whole face changed as though a mask had dropped upon it. He rasped: "You, Edward Williams—what are you to Nanette?"

It took me wholly by surprise. I stammered: "Why, an old friend."

"Yes?" He changed again. He purred it. His hunched shoulders were exaggerated as he leaned forward, and his fingers were unconsciously stroking his waistcoat. "Yes? Nothing more than that?"

More than that! It flooded me now; I knew in that instant what all my life I had not known before—how dear Nanette had grown to me—of all the world, most dear.

I must have been stammering. He cut me short. "Strange that Fate should have delivered you into my hands." Purring again; he seemed like a cat, licking his lips. His eyes roved me. "She loves you."

I gathered my wits. "What are you talking about? Nanette love me? What nonsense!" My tone sounded

hollow; his black gaze was boring into me. I said boldly: "Why should it bother you?"

I WONDERED why he had not already killed me. He answered, not only my question, but almost my thought.

"A girl who amounts to nothing, but it happens that I love her. Wolf Turber—the great Wolf Turber—you would not think it of me, would you?"

Unfathomable fellow! There was almost sincerity mixed with the irony of his tone. "And because I want her love—she has just a little hold over me." He added wryly: "I've just now promised her I would not kill you. She thinks of nothing else, so I promised her—to get it off her mind."

I managed, "Well, I thank you both."

"You need not. Her brother Alan—there is no complication with him since we left him dead back there in the park."

It sent a shudder over me; but somehow I did not believe it.

A man stood at the door. "Wolf Turber, will you come?"

"Coming, Jonas."

Turber leaned smilingly over me. Against all my will, I shrank back from his grinning, massive face.

"I will not kill you. But this you need not mention to Nanette—there are things not so pleasant as being swiftly killed. We will take you with us. She and I—we'll take you to my great city. And when we get there she will see you as a hideous object, Williams." His chuckle was gruesome. "If she has love in her heart for you, it will vanish when she beholds you as you will be then."

He straightened. "Lie where you are. When I call you can come out

—if you promise not to be troublesome."

He closed the door upon me.

CHAPTER IX

THE WOMAN JOSEFA

THIS Time-voyage in the Turber aero seemed in duration four or five hours. Crowded hours! A cosmorama of whirling eons. Turber flung us far backward in Time. I did not see any of this part of the trip. I lay in the cabin, pondering what Turber had said—wondering what I could do to escape with Nanette. And wondering if Alan really were dead.

Then Turber called me for the meal. I found Nanette white and solemn and very silent. She spoke to me, casually, it seemed cautiously. I had always known Nanette to have a will of her own; and she was nimble-witted. I saw now that she was wholly on her guard. She was silent, apparently docile with Turber. Watchful. She found opportunity once to press my hand. And to murmur, "Careful, Edward—do not anger him."

A new mood was upon Turber. He seemed in a high good humor. He was courtly with Nanette. Pleasant enough with me; but there was an edge of irony to his pleasantness.

"A long trip, Williams, but we are comfortable enough. If you cause no trouble you may sit in the control room later. A wonderful view from there."

I asked, "Where are we going?"

"Nowhere," he said. "In Space we are not moving. I have us poised over what you and I used to call the shore of the Hudson River. You remember it? About the foot of Eightieth Street."

He seemed pleased to talk—probably for Nanette's benefit, to please his vanity by exalting himself. "I'm taking us back in Time—back near the beginning of life on this earth. Then coming forward. I have several stops to make. Mere pauses—though in the year 1664 we shall have to make a longer stop. Stay there perhaps for the passing of a night. It's a quaint world here, in 1664." He chuckled. "It is to yield me, I hope, quite a little treasure. Gold and jewels. Money, as you know, is an all-powerful thing."

There were just the three of us at the meal. The interior of this hundred-foot aero was capacious, but there seemed only a few people on board. Turber once made reference to the fact that upon this, his last passing, we had many people to gather. But what few I now saw made a motley crew indeed! There were several men, brown, white, hairy of body, clothed in crude animal skins; heads which showed retreating foreheads upon which the tangled, matted hair grew low; dangling, gorilla-like arms. Men from some primitive age, snatched up by Turber. They seemed stupidly docile; animal-like.

THERE was a fellow who seemed the opposite extreme. Turber called him Jonas. A man of about thirty, small and slender, with a long white robe, a golden-tasseled sash, and a gold band about his forehead. His wavy brown hair was long to the base of his neck. His skin was pale white. His features delicately molded; his nose thin, high-bridged; his mouth loose-lipped. He was obsequious with Turber. He suggested Lea and San a trifle. I surmised that he might belong to their Time-world.

The giant Indian, he of the flat, broken nose, was operating the con-

trols of the aero. Furber called him Bluntnose. He was, I learned later, a Mohican Indian of New York State.

Motley crew! And there was one woman. Turber addressed her as Josefa. She served us the meal. She wore a waist and a gaudy skirt with a vivid sash. Her thick black hair fell on her shoulders. Her face had a barbaric beauty with a mixture of races stamped upon it. She spoke English, with occasional Spanish words intermingled.

She served us with what seemed a defiant sullenness. It contrasted with Turber's good humor. He reached for the woman once as she passed him—reached for her with a coarse caress. But she drew away; and his grin at me was a leer of amusement.

This pantomime—which Nanette did not see—was to be plain enough. And a moment later, as I chanced to look around, I saw the woman standing watching us; staring at Nanette and Turber. And there was upon her face a blazing intensity of hate. She stood tense, hands upon her hips. Her fingers were writhing; and in the folds of her sash I saw protruding the handle of a dagger.

CHAPTER X

PLANNING THE ESCAPE

WE FINISHED the meal. Turber rose. "Come into the control room. We can see better from there."

There was only Bluntnose in the control room. He sat at his instruments and dials. His face was inscrutable as he looked up and saw Nanette and me.

"We will sit here," said Turber. "Here, Nanette—by me."

He pushed me away with silent ve-

hemence. I sat down by a window. The door to the corridor which ran the length of the aero was behind me. I saw the woman Josefa out there; she was staring after us, but in a moment she moved away.

Turber spoke to his Indian. "You have been pausing, Bluntnose?"

"Yes." The Indian spoke with a low guttural intonation. "Yes. Saw nothing where could stop."

"No," said Turber. "Well, we'll go forward now." He turned to me. "We had hoped, along here in these primitive ages there might be some great reptile lying dead. One with tusks." He grinned. "In civilized times, ivory is very valuable."

He sat beside Nanette. "I'm not sure that we shall stop, child. Except in 1664. I am impatient to get back home with you. We will have a wonderful life, Nanette—riches and power. Master and mistress of all the world. Wolf Turber—master of the world. You'll be proud of me."

I could not catch her answer. I could see her involuntarily shrinking away from his caress.

I sat alert with roving thoughts. Nanette and I would have to escape; but how? If the aero paused in one of these primitive ages, could I snatch Nanette and leap out? Unthinkable! But in 1664? If we paused there for a night, I would make my play then. Nanette and I, to live out our lives together in little Dutch-English New York.

There was nothing I could do now, and presently I was engrossed, listening to Turber's voice, and regarding the vast scene spread before us through these windows. The control room was in the bow-peak of the aero. Banks of windows on both sides gave nearly an unobstructed view.

Tremendous cosmorama! We were

still poised motionless about two hundred feet in the air. My mind went to my own Time-world. New York City of 1945. Beneath me here would be the New York Central Railroad tracks; Riverside Drive; the Hudson. Grant's Tomb, just a short distance to the north. And behind me, the spread of New York's streets and solid buildings.

This same Space, how different now! Turber was saying to Nanette: "We are about one billion years, B. C. That's a long time in the past, isn't it? But we are traveling forward very fast."

I gazed out upon a landscape gray and misty; blurred, unreal as a shimmering ghost. The colors of nature were blended into gray; melting phantoms—the changes of a century encompassed within an instant of my consciousness. It created a pseudo-movement; a blurred, changing outline.

An unreality, a ghostly aspect upon all the scene. Yet I was the speeding phantom; and these things at which I stared were the realities.

A vast area of gray land and water lay spread around us. The water lashed and tumbled; swirls of mist and steam rose from it. The land lay with a gray look of movement. A naked land. No vegetation here yet. No soil. A land perhaps almost viscous, congealed from the lashing ocean. It spread like a great gray plain; the mists and vapors rose from the land-crust as from the sea. Mists and swirling masses of steam, surging up into the orange-gray of the sky. Condensing, dissipating, forming the atmosphere.

I fancied as we plunged through these early centuries that vast storms were here. Vast cataclysms of nature. Torrential deluges of hot rain pouring down from the clouds

that these mists were forming. Dire winds that plucked and tore at the sea; earthquakes that rocked and tumbled this land and swept this sea with tidal waves gigantic.

LIFE here? This was the Beginning. There was a shore line quite near us. It wavered and blurred as the centuries altered it. A reach of shallow water where the waves rolled up against the bleak land-rocks. Life was beginning there. In the shallows of the sea I could envisage the microscopic protoplasms, like algae that form the green scum on a pond, lying here in the shallows. Restless, irritable organisms! Desiring food to eat. Urged by the primitive spark of life to eat and grow and multiply.

Unending sweep of changing land and sea and these living things within it! A million years swept into the Past in a moment. An unfamiliar scene here now. A different sweep of land—a different reach of sea. A land rising to the west as though a great serrated mountain chain had heaved up in those whirling centuries. Gray, shadowy mountains—bleak ghosts of rocky peaks. Dark valleys dank with heavy vapors; a coastal plain against which the sea was beating.

I could fancy that on the lower steppes of this more solid crust vegetation now was taking hold. We were passing too fast for any details. There were fleeting glimpses of what might have been vegetation. A forest—springing from nothing, existing and vanishing while I blinked. But I could seem to see a forest, springing into lush life from the heated soil; growing to a jungle; whirled away in a cataclysm that tore and ripped all this land and water. Or a forest that grew, lived and de-

cayed; enriched the soil with other, different giants of trees to live after it.

We were going forward too fast for such tiny details. But the great changes were obvious.

Again, beyond what I actually saw, my fancy roamed. From the shore-water protoplasms, the restless living things had ventured now. The ocean was peopled. Great swimming reptiles had been here and were here now. Nature's first efforts—from the microscopic protoplasms to these great monsters of the sea! Millions of years developing toward size only. The ages of life gigantic! We were sweeping through them now.

Amphibians were living now. I can conceive the first such sea creature with its restless urge for experimentation—the urge within it, forcing it to try for something better—I can imagine it coming from the deeps into the shallow water of the shore. Venturing further; rearing its great head up from the water into the air. Trying again; lunging—dragging its great length up to the land. Feeling the sunlight.

The ages of the giants! Huge, heavy-armored things—armored so that the battle for existence might be won and life go on. Tremendous swimming, walking and flying reptiles, peopling the sea, the land and the air. Evolving through one-celled to many-celled organisms; to sea-squirts and sluggish giant sea-worms; and, millions of years still farther, to the vertebrates, and then the giant mammals. Nature struggling for size in the individual. The ages of the giants!

As restless as the changing life was the changing environment. I saw the mountains rise and drop; and the sea surge in and back again; an instant when for ten thousand cen-

turies there must have been great heat here—and then a sweep of ice.

Throughout it all, life struggled, adapting itself, patiently trying new forms; driven away from here by hostile nature—but coming back again. Struggling.

AN HOUR or two must have passed as I sat there engrossed. Turber had been talking steadily to Nanette.

I heard him say:

"We are entering now the last million years before the Time of Christ."

1,000,000 B. C.! Out of the thousand such intervals, only one was left!

There had been no attempt by Turber to stop our flight in any of these centuries. I wondered why he had made this trip.

He had said to Nanette: "I have really done this to show it to you." But I doubted that. He had told me, with a grin, that he might stop for an ivory tusk of some prehistoric monster. But I did not believe it; especially since he had made no effort to stop.

I got the answer now; his real reason. The fellow Jonas came into the control room. He stood by Turber. They talked for a moment, softly, but I could hear them.

"You think, Jonas, that we have shaken off that cursed Time-vision?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Lentz would do his best to fool them."

This meant nothing to me. Had Alan been here, how well he would have understood it!

"Yes. But Lea and San are persistent. You should have laid plans, master, to capture that tower."

Turber smiled wryly. "I suppose so. But I've been busy, Jonas. If

Lentz had any sense he would have wrecked the tower for me."

"And left himself stranded? You expect too much, Master. Lentz wants to join us."

I could only partially understand. But it was clear that Turber wanted to shake off pursuit. He was planning to stop in 1664. He wanted no interference there.

If I had known that presently Alan would be speeding there in the tower to help me!

There was just a moment when Nanette and I were left alone. Turber went out of the room with Jonas. Bluntnose, the Indian, sat at his dials. But he was some distance away and his back was toward us.

I moved to Nanette. I touched her. I whispered:

"Nanette."

"Edward?"

"We're alone. Only the Indian—his back is turned."

"Edward, be careful of yourself." Her dear hand clung to me. "Careful!"

"Nanette, listen—we're going to stop in the year 1664. It will be night, Turber said. We'll be here all night."

"Yes. I heard him. But, Edward—"

"I'm going to try to get us out of here then. I can't tell you how—I don't know. But I'll watch a chance for us."

A step sounded behind us. My heart leaped. I half rose from my seat. The woman Josefa was bending over us. At my movement she hissed:

"Hush, you fool! Stop that!" Her glance went to the Indian in the distant forward part of the cabin. "He'll hear you. *Dios!* Sit quiet."

"What do you want?"

"I tell you. Only a moment I have—Turber will be back."

"What? What do you want to tell me?"

"This. When we stop—night in the forest, you understand? I will watch for a way to help you. It will be dark—I can get you out, you and this girl." She paused breathlessly, then blazed. "Take her! Never let Turber see her again!"

I could gladly agree to that. I whispered vehemently: "Yes, of course. That's what I want. How will—"

"Later I find a way. *Madre di Dios*, he—"

She saw Turber down the corridor. She murmured swiftly: "You be ready."

She turned and was gone. In the corridor I saw her pass Turber. He seized her and kissed her; and this time she submitted.

TURBER joined us. "Ah, so you are entertaining my little Nanette?" I moved away at his command. He sat down. "We are only half a million years before the Time of Christ now."

500,000 B. C.! A new land was here now. A shadowy, rolling area of forests. Fertile jungles. Miasmic. Primeval tangles of rank vegetation. Land reptiles were here. We could not see them—not even the shadows of them. The great life-span of one of them, had it lain motionless beneath us, would have been too swift and brief a shadow for our sight! But I knew that they were here. Giant things. Dinosaurs and monster birds. Land vertebrates.

And the mammals were here now as well. The end of ancient life was come. The end of the great reptiles was at hand. Nature had made an

error, and was busy now in rectifying it. The giants, handicapped by their huge size, unwieldy bulk and dull-witted brains, were sorely pressed in the great struggle for existence. Creatures smaller were evolving; creatures more agile of body; more quick-witted of brain. They fought their environment better. They lived; they thrived.

Another few minutes while we sat at the cabin windows. The giant reptiles went down into defeat. The archaic mammals flourished and rose into the higher mammals. The lemurs were here. And then the anthropoids. Apes of pseudo-human form skulking in these lush jungles.

The stage was set for man.

I saw all life here driven away into defeat with a glacial sweep of ice coming down. It enveloped the aero for an instant. We must have been within it—glaciers over us with our phantom vehicle speeding through them.

The ice age passed. The land and the sea sprang once more into shadowy form. The gray phantom jungles were here again. The living things, driven elsewhere, came back. The giant mammals like all the giants were losing the battle. The smaller creatures were surviving. The ice came again, and passed. And again. Vast climate changes. Was the axis of the earth altering in its inclination? I think so.

The ice ages passed. The apelike man had been roaming Java for nearly half a million years now. Roaming, and spreading.

Two hundred thousand years and, a little less apelike, the Heidelberg man was wandering throughout Europe—and Asia perhaps. The Pilt-down men flourished and fell and left their record in England and Europe. I wondered if here in this

Space of New York City there could have been men like apes in those ages. We did not stop; there is no one to say.

The glaciers withdrew. The Neanderthal race gave way to higher forms. The Cro-Magnons struggled with their primitive thinking.

Reason had come. Man—true mankind—was upon the earth at last. His earth!

He held it now, rising against environment and against all the efforts of the beast to hold him down!

The Indian at the dials said abruptly: "25,000 B. C."

"Ah," said Turber, "the age of civilization, little Nanette. We are entering it now. It starts here—and when it reaches its peak, I will be master of it. Ruling the world—with you."

His fingers touched her hair. Enigmatic, unfathomable scoundrel! I sat, ignored by him, tensely regarding him. And I could have sworn that he was wholly sincere. His fingers gently stroked her hair.

"Ruling the world, Nanette. I have selected its greatest Time—the peak of civilization. I will be Master of it, and you its Mistress. A wonderful destiny for you, child."

He waited, and she murmured awkwardly: "Why—yes—"

He frowned a little. "You do not love me yet. Oh, Nanette, don't you understand? It is your love I want. Not you without your love."

"Yes," she said. "I understand."

A pang went through me. An impressive scoundrel this! He went on earnestly:

"I think there will be a great battle, Nanette. But we will win. We will conquer Great New York of 2445. And you'll live out your life five hundred years in the future of that world in which you and I were born."

He turned to the window. "This is a backward Space, Nanette. Elsewhere on the earth man now in these eras before Christ is leaving the impress of his struggle. But not here. It's all still empty—no evidence of civilized man. But its outlines are familiar. Why, if you could see it, Nanette, you'd recognize it now. The ocean is to the east of us. The shores: the islands. This is Manhattan Island beneath us. Slower, Bluntnose! Remember, we stop at that appointed night of 1664. Go slower! We want no shock to harm my little Nanette."

His voice went on.

WE PASSED through the centuries with constantly decreasing speed, and entered the Christian era. Then to 1000 A. D. The Mongols had come from the Eastern world, come here and lived, cut off upon this backward continent. Without contact, they remained backward. Primitive savages. They were here now—the American Indian with his wigwams set in the forests of these wooded slopes; his signal fires rising above the trees; his bark canoes floating on these sheltered waters. But his impress upon Nature was too slight for us to see.

Men, risen higher in civilization's scale, were in Europe now. Thinking. Wondering. Soon they would be here, adventuring.

1500 A. D. Columbus had come into the west now. Seeking his passage to China he had come, and returned disappointed in his quest. We passed 1550. And 1600. 1609 A. D. was gone by in a moment. Henry Hudson had been here now! The Half Moon had come sailing up this placid river. A flash, those days, so brief to us that we saw nothing. But with my mind's eye, I saw it. Quaint lit-

tle ship, adventuring here. Passing our island; navigating the river up beyond where Albany was to be; seeking the passage to China, running aground up there in the narrowing river and deciding with complete correctness that here was no easy way to China; and turning back and departing, disappointed.

Turber was saying: "Ah, here is man—at last—"

The standard of civilized man! Something enduring of man's handiwork was visible off there through one of the windows. Shadows—tiny blurs—of what might have been houses were materializing on the marshes of the Jersey lowlands; a settlement. It persisted, and grew. And now, another—here on our island near at hand.

To the south—the lower tip of Manhattan Island—the outlines of a fort had appeared; it endured; a fort with a stockade. In a breath, like tiny chickens clustering about the mother hen, little buildings were appearing. All within the stockade at first.

THE Dutch were here! New Amsterdam existed here, now! The humble, struggling beginning of the great city. But it persisted. It grew. Tiny shadows of houses flowed into shadowy being as we stared. All were down at the lower end of the island—and the savages roamed up here.

The years went by. The hardy Dutchmen were thriving. On all the distant shores we could see the small settlements appearing. All over the busy scene the Dutch were imprinting evidence of their hardihood. The peppery Peter Stuyvesant was stamping his wooden leg about here now. I could imagine him upon his brash forays into enemy country. Warring

upon the savages; and upon greater game. Voyaging with trenchant beligerence to attack the Swedes of the Delaware.

We were nearly at our destination. The aero was going very slowly. Soon there was almost color in the scene. Soundless flashes of what seemed alternate light and darkness.

Turber stood up. "Just sit quiet, Nanette! Hold the arms of your chair; don't be frightened."

He went over and stood by Blunt-nose. "The exact night—don't mistake it."

"No."

There was a long period of daylight. Long? It may have been a second or two.

Then darkness. Then light again. My heart was pounding. Outside in the corridor I saw the woman Josefa standing against the wall.

Darkness outside again. The cabin reeled. It lurched. The humming vibration was gone. I heard Turber's voice: "Good enough! Not much after sunset."

We hung in the air; poised over the river.

A quiet starlight night. Early evening. The aero's horizontal propellers were whirling; I could hear their throb. We sank gently to the ground, with the depths of the forest about us and the starlit river near by.

CHAPTER XI

THE ESCAPE

NANETTE and I sat quiet. The figure of Josefa had disappeared from the corridor. Turber had gone out hastily with a command to Nanette and me.

"Don't move. Stay in your chairs."

We were alone in the control room, except for the Indian, Blunt-nose. He

had ignored us throughout the trip, but he was not ignoring us now. He stood a few feet away, like a statue in the gloom, watching us closely. A tomahawk was hung at his belt; a modern automatic revolver was in his hand.

The aero, inside and out, was in confusion. The tramp of feet; a babble of voices. Through the windows I could see a dark forest glade with the yellow light of a campfire near by. And the glint of a starlit river, with a shadowy cove quite near us.

I whispered: "The Indian is watching us, Nanette—we mustn't move."

Turber presently came in. A short sword was strapped to his belt; and a revolver in a holster.

"Good news," he said. "It's coming! They're bringing it by water from up the river."

The Indian grunted.

"It will take several hours, Blunt-

nose. But the first of it is almost here—a canoe is in sight."

He was jubilant. He dashed away, but I called to him.

"Dr. Turber."

He came back.

"Let us go out and see it," I said. "What is it? Your treasure?"

"Yes." He hesitated. "Nanette—if only you could see this added wealth coming to us now!"

"I'd like to go out," she said. I could feel her fingers tighten on my arm.

Turber spoke to Bluntnose. The fellow Jonas appeared in the corridor. He called excitedly: "The first canoe is very nearly landing, Wolf Turber. There's another in sight. Are you coming?"

Turber hastened away. I urged the Indian: "Let us go out and see it."

"Come, then." He shoved us before him, down the corridor to the



A bargain was struck with Peter Stuyvesant.

main side doorway. I did not see Josefa.

"Careful, Nanette." I helped her down the small ladder. Bluntnose was very watchful. He said:

"Sit over there. Don't move."

He sat us by the bole of a great tree some twenty feet from the vehicle. In the glow of the firelight I saw the dark shadowy forms of Indians moving about. A group of them were waiting down by the shore. A fat Dutchman was with them, round as a barrel in his leather jerkin and pantaloons. He jabbered excitedly in English.

"Did I not tell you, Wolf Turber? I've done it—such a treasure! Come here, vrouw!" His wife stood beside a tree. "This is the great Turber, woman. Do we go with you now, Wolf Turber?"

"Yes."

"Glad I am to get out of here. The blow-hard Stuyvesant meets his match tomorrow. Did you know that? The English are coming."

"Yes," said Turber. He turned toward the shore. The Dutchman followed him. "Our boat is here. Unload your things, woman. Carry them up—get them in this airship. We're going to a better world, good wife."

His voice was lost as they moved away.

NANETTE sat beside me, silent, motionless. But I knew that she was alert—waiting for what I might command her to do.

I whispered: "Not yet. The Indian is here, close. I don't see Josefa. But I'm watching for a chance to get away."

The pressure of her hand answered me. Brave little Nanette!

The Indian seemed never to take his eyes from us. The automatic

was ready in his hand; I could not have made a move.

Where was Josefa? If she could distract this Indian even for a moment—

Five minutes passed. Ten minutes. My mind strayed to Alan. Was he dead? In reality, Alan and the tower were at this instant materializing in the forest no more than a mile away.

Out in the river a long Indian war canoe appeared. It was heading for the cove. Its paddles gleamed rhythmically in the starlight. It landed. I saw that it was piled with moldy chests. The Indians began carrying them to the aero. The Dutchman and his wife struggled back and forth with their household effects.

Turber and Jonas were giving commands. Then I saw Josefa! She was down by the shore. She spoke to Turber. I saw him reach into a broken chest and haul forth a huge jeweled bangle. He tossed it to her and moved away.

She came toward us. I did not move. She stood by Bluntnose.

"Look what the Wolf gave me. What jewels we have now. This pleases me more than all Turber's platinum and golden wealth."

She was standing in front of Bluntnose, blocking his sight of us. He pushed her away.

I cursed myself. Had my chance come and gone? But it had only been an instant. He would have shot at Nanette and me before we had gone ten feet.

I caught the woman's significant glance. She was trying to make my opportunity. Nanette felt me stir. Nanette knew that the moment had almost come.

Josefa said: "Turber wants you, Bluntnose—there is a chest that fell

in the water. These fool Indians—not Mohican like you, are they, Blunt-nose? Not one of them will dive, even for jewels."

The Indian hesitated. Turber fortunately was not within sight. There was an Indian wading in the shallows of the shore.

"These captives—"

"He told me to watch them. Dios! If I could not shoot better than you! Give me that ugly thing."

She took the automatic; took it gently from him. Her face was up-raised; her smiling lips were mockingly alluring.

He yielded the weapon; and suddenly leaned down and kissed her with a rough caress.

"You bad Indian! Never let Wolf Turber see you do that! Go now—show him you fear no river when it has jewels in it. I'll keep the prisoners safe."

She covered us with the automatic; she stood ten feet away. "Hurry back, Blunt-nose."

He went. She stood tense. She met my glance, but did not answer it. Her gaze roved the near-by glade. There was a moment when no one near by was observing us. She gestured with the automatic.

"Go! Run south toward the village. I'll fire presently—and I'll tell them you went north. Run fast!"

"Nanette—run!" I lifted her up; held her hand; we slid into the underbrush and ran.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE FOREST DEPTHS

IN THE tower, Alan, with Lea, San, and Lentz, came speeding back to this night in 1664. San plunged the tower to its swiftest

pace—the trip seemed less than an hour.

At first they sat in the lower room. Alan could not make up his mind about Lentz. The fellow appeared loyal enough. Anxious to help; and certainly his presence was an advantage. But Alan determined to watch him closely, always.

Both Lea and San were startled at Lentz's appearance in the tower. That was obvious; and several times Alan seemed to read in their expressions that they, too, were suspicious of the man.

Lentz interpreted:

"San must stay always with the tower. He wants me to be sure you understand that."

"Yes, I do."

"And Lea says she will go with you—"

The Turber aero was on the river bank not much more than a mile from where the tower would land. It was Alan's plan to try and creep up on it.

"What weapons have you?" Lentz asked.

Alan showed him the revolver. Lentz reached to take it.

"No," said Alan. "I'll keep it. What have you?"

Lentz had a knife—a long, thin blade in a sheath. Alan wondered what else. For an instant he had an impulse to search the fellow. But he decided it would be a wrong move. He smiled.

"That might be handier than mine. Mine makes a noise. You'll go with me, Lentz?"

"Yes. That is what I think best. I have so often seen this forest with the instruments—I can guide you."

"And—me?" said Lea.

"You stay here," said Alan decisively.

She burst into a flood of words to Lentz.

"She says she speaks the dialect of these Indians of 1664. She has studied it in the dead-language books— She can talk to the Indians. She stopped there once — they thought she was a goddess."

Lea said: "Yes. Yes—magic—this tower."

"She means," said Lentz, "they saw the tower. It was magic to them—she says, if we meet any band of savages she can get them to help us."

Alan decided against it. Haste was necessary; they could not be sure how long Turber's aero would remain.

"No," he said. "Tell Lea, I think not. You and I will go, Lentz. She and San had better remain with the tower."

Lea was disappointed, but she yielded.

Near the end of the trip San remained at the controls; the others went to the top of the tower. It presently lurched and stopped.

Alan saw that they were in the forest. A quiet, starlit evening. From this height at the tower's top, the distant Hudson showed plainly. A dark, rolling area of woods, thick with underbrush. To the south a few lights in the little city of New Amsterdam were visible. Almost directly west, by the river, there was a yellow glow.

"That's where Turber is," said Lentz.

"Yes," Lea agreed. And she pointed southeast. Another camp fire was off there—a mile or so away, perhaps. A band of Indians encamped.

AS WELL as he could, Alan tried to keep in mind the lay of this strange land. Strangely dark and sinister forest. Yet Alan was born right here in this same Space! He had lived here all his life. This, in 1945, was Central Park. The Turber aero lay over by Riverside Drive. But how different now!

Out in the Hudson River a large canoe was coming south. It seemed heading in the direction of the Turber aero.

They went back to the lower tower room. Through the windows here the black woods crowded like a wall.

"Tell them, Lentz, to watch closely. At any sign of trouble, tell them to take the tower and escape."

Lentz told them. They nodded solemnly. Lea gave Alan her hand. Again, as always, its touch thrilled him. She said:

"Good-by, Alan. Good—luck."

"Good-by, Lea."

In the woods, Lentz and Alan crept through the underbrush.

"You lead," Alan whispered. He felt safer with Lentz in front of him. But he told himself that was foolish; Lentz seemed perfectly friendly.

"Quiet, we make no noise. In these woods, it seems, savages are everywhere."

It was rough, heavy traveling. The underbrush was thick; there were fallen trees, tiny streams occasionally; deep, solemn glens, thick with leafy mold and huge ferns. And the solid wall of trees. Wild brier, dogwood, sumach, and white birch occasionally, gleaming, ghostlike, in the gloom.

Silent, sinister recesses. At every crackling twig beneath their tread, Alan's heart leaped. The Indians of this forest could glide through it soundlessly. Alan felt a dozen times

that he and Lentz were being stalked.

"Where are we, Lentz? Wait a minute."

They crossed perilously on the top of a fallen tree, which spanned a deep ravine. Lentz waited at its end for Alan to come. Lentz whispered: "Let me help you."

There was an instant when it flashed to Alan that Lentz might push him off. Alan drew back.

"Move on—I'll get down."

They crouched at the end of the tree. It occurred to Alan that he had been foolish to bring Lentz. His mistrust of the fellow was growing. But it seemed an unreasonable mistrust.

"Where are we, Lentz?"

"Halfway there, I think. Or more. We should see the light of the camp fire soon."

They started again. Presently Lentz stopped. Alan could see him, ten feet ahead, standing against a tree-trunk.

"What is it?" Alan advanced until they stood together. Lentz pointed. Two eyes gleamed in the brush ahead. Alan impulsively raised his weapon, but Lentz checked him.

"Quiet! Some animal."

NOT an Indian. Alan relaxed. Of course not—human eyes do not glisten like that in the darkness.

It may have been a wildcat. The eyes moved; there was a rustling; the thing was gone.

"Shot would spoil everything," Lentz whispered. "Come on."

Once more they started. The stars were almost hidden by the thick interlacing of the forest trees. Alan had long since lost his sense of direction. This space—Eighty-Sixth Street, from the park to Riverside Drive. How different now!

Alan was lost. He followed Lentz. But it seemed that Lentz was bending always too much to the left. Once Alan said:

"That way, isn't it?"

"No. I think not. That is north. This is west."

But to Alan the feeling persisted. They plunged down into a dell, at the bottom of which ran a tiny, purling brook. They waded it.

"Lentz!" he whispered.

They crouched together. There was something close ahead of them in the woods. Figures—unmistakable human figures—stood lurking against a tree off there!

In the silence Alan could almost hear his pounding heart. He was afraid to move; a crackling twig would have sounded like a shot.

A moment. Then there was a rustling ahead. The figures moved. They ran.

The underbrush cracked under them. They had seen Alan and Lentz and were running. They reached, in a few feet, an open space of starlight. Alan saw them clearly.

He gasped, and then he called softly, cautiously:

"Nanette! Ed—stop! It's Alan—"

It was Nanette and I, wandering lost.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRAITOR

WE STOOD together, there in the forest glen, for a minute or two exchanging swift whispers. The fellow Lentz—I did not know who he was then, unfortunately—stood a few feet from us. He was listening to the woods. Then he came to us.

"I thought we might have been

heard. Was any one following you?" He addressed it to me.

Nanette and I had feared pursuit, but there had seemed none. We had tried to head south—Josefa had said she would direct our pursuers the other way. She was to have fired a shot—to make plausible her story that we had escaped her. We had heard no shot. Nor had Alan and Lentz. And in these silent woods the shot would have been heard plainly.

Nanette and I were wholly lost. I realized it when I tried to tell Alan which way we should go to reach the tower.

"We must get there at once," said Alan. He gestured toward Lentz. He whispered: "That fellow—I may be wrong, but I don't trust him."

We could not agree on where we were, or which way might be the tower.

"Oh, Lentz!" He came closer to us. Alan whispered: "Which way would you say?"

The patch of starlight overhead was too small to help us. I suggested: "I'll climb one of these trees. If I can see the camp fire at Turber's—"

But it would take too long. By now there was undoubtedly a Turber party of Indians in these woods searching for us. They might cut us off from the tower, or locate the tower itself.

"I think," said Lentz, "this way."

To me it seemed that he was right. "But that's south," said Alan.

I did not think so. Lentz said: "I led you wrong before—it was my mistake. But I am sure now."

His frankness convinced us. We started. Lentz was leading; Alan and I guided Nanette. Slow, careful going. We made as little noise as we could. We came to a slight rise of

ground. A distant gleam of water showed ahead of us.

"Alan, look!"

"That's the East River."

"Yes, I think so."

It seemed so; it was very faint through the trees. Lentz had not seen it—or he ignored it. But he heard that we had stopped; he turned and came back.

"What is it?"

"That water—the river off there! We're going wrong."

I became aware that we were standing in a patch of starlight. "Not here, Alan! Don't stand here!"

Almost in a panic we left the hillock and crouched in a thicket at its foot.

Lentz whispered: "That river—that's to the east. Then Turber's aero is off there—the western river." He pointed behind us. "And then the tower would be this way."

It seemed so. We started again at almost right angles to our former course. For what might have been half an hour we crept along. It was eerie. The woods seemed empty of all human life save ourselves. But in the silence, the insect life screamed with tumultuous voices.

WE HEARD, in the distance, the mournful hooting of an owl. Or was it an owl? Was it, perhaps, some Indian signaling?

My nerves were tense; I was trembling, straining my eyes to see, and my ears to hear. It was difficult, keeping Nanette from falling. It seemed as though the noise we made must reverberate through all these woods. How far we went I do not know. It seemed miles.

A glow of light showed ahead of us! The tower? We stopped. Not the tower. Why—a stockade! A high picket fence. A building. A

northern outpost of New Amsterdam!

Realization swept us. That river we had glimpsed was not the East River, but the Hudson. We had turned exactly the wrong way; had wandered far to the south. Or had been misled by Lentz. At one time, until we checked him, we were headed for the Turber camp. The fellow realized we understood. He was beside Alan; and as Alan turned on him Lentz leaped and struck with his knife. Alan fired. The shot roared like a cannon in the woods. It caught Lentz in the hand; the knife dropped.

So quick, all this, that I had not moved from Nanette. Like a cat, Lentz eluded Alan. Leaped behind a tree. And then ran, with Alan after him.

I called, frantically: "Alan, come back! We'll lose each other!"

Alan's revolver spat again. Then he came back; we could hear Lentz plunging off through the underbrush.

"What rotten shooting!" Alan groaned.

We seized Nanette and ran north; heedless of noise. Voices were behind us. Torches showed back there.

"Not so fast, Alan. We're making too much rumpus!"

We slowed. Then we stopped to listen. The woods seemed full of voices. Heavy tread of feet, pounding in the brush. Behind us. Then ahead of us! We crouched; no use running now. We were surrounded. Torches flared. A dog was howling. I saw, off in the trees, the heavy figure of a man holding a blazing torch aloft. He held an ancient fowling piece half raised; the dog was on a leash leading him.

Figures closed in on us. They saw us in the light of their torches.

"No use, Alan."

Alan stuck his revolver in his

pocket. We stood up, holding Nanette.

The Dutchman seized us, and stood jabbering. Sturdy fellows, in shirts and broad jackets, flowing pantaloons and hobnailed shoes. They were almost all bareheaded; hastily dressed. They stood amazed at us. They pulled at Nanette.

"Let her alone," said Alan.

It was a mistake. English! One of them spoke English. He said:

"You English?"

They tore us apart from each other. They hurried us off. I heard one say: "English! The damned English here already! Well can I speak it! Ho, but our good Peter will be pleased at this midnight foray."

They dragged us south, into New Amsterdam.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BARGAIN WITH STUYVESANT

IT SEEMED a long march. We had aroused a single fort—a northern outpost of the city. They took us past that; following a crude corduroy road. A noisy, blustering cortege we made in the woods. Some fifty Dutchmen, armed with fowling pieces and swords; carrying torches.

We came to other outposts. Our party augmented. We passed through a long, armed stockade, and were in the little city.

It was well toward midnight now. But the city needed no arousing. The houses were all lighted. Crude log houses, most of one story, but some with two. The winding streets, bounded by picket fences and the houses with little gardens and vegetable patches, were thronged with excited Dutchmen. For this was a mo-

mentous night. The English were coming. Nichols, emissary of the Duke of York, already had sent his demand that Peter Stuyvesant surrender this little Dutch Empire to English rule. His fleet now had been sighted; it would anchor in the bay to-morrow.

All day, and now far into the night, the little city had been in a turmoil. The streets were littered with groups of jabbering patroons firing up their great pipes and vowing that the thing was dastardly. How dare the English duke demand their surrender! They rushed at us; stared open-mouthed; but our captors fended them off, and vouchsafed nothing.

I seized upon this fellow who spoke English.

"Where are you taking us?"

"To the Governor. He is in Council now."

Down by the Bowling Green, near where the main fort displayed its flag and menaced the bay with its cannon, Peter Stuyvesant sat in the upper story of his home deliberating with his Council upon this crisis. But we never reached there. We went only a block or two from the northern edge of the city. The Dutchmen on the street corners gazed up at their tin weathercocks and prayed for a storm that would blow Nichols's fleet to perdition. They came running out from their gardens to regard us, and jabbered some more. The city was flooded with words this night.

An argument broke out among our captors. We were faced about, taken north again.

"What is it?" I demanded.

"Keep you here," said our interpreter. "The good Peter will come up to see you."

We were taken back. Out beyond the stockade, a little blockhouse stood

on a rise of ground. The woods were thick around it.

"Leave you here," the fellow told us. "There is enough trouble in the city to-night. Peter will come up to see you." He chuckled. "Tomorrow they will bargain with Nichols's emissary at the Bowling Green—unless, as I hope, the Council decides to have our fort blow up these cursed English ships as soon as they appear. But if there is a bargain, by the gods it is nice to have you English out here secluded in the woods as hostages."

He evidently thought we were strangely dressed, important personages connected with the English invasion. Sent ahead, perhaps, to stir up the Indians in the northern woods. He said something like that; and how could we contradict it?

The log fort was a heavy-set structure. Two rooms in the lower story with an open space like an attic under the peaked roof. We were flung into one of the rooms. Its windows were barred with solid planks. The Dutchmen bound us with lengths of rope and laid us like bundles on the floor.

"Lie there—keep quiet."

THEY slammed the oak door upon us. We lay in the darkness. In the next room when most of them departed, we fancied some half a dozen had been left to guard us. We heard their voices; the light from their candles showed through the chinks of the interior log wall.

We whispered to each other. We were worried about Nanette but she was unhurt.

"Yes, all right, Alan. But I'm so frightened."

"At least it's better than being in Turber's hands, Nanette." If we could escape now, there might still be time to get back to the tower. If

not—well, we might be stranded here to live out our lives in New Amsterdam. But at least, these Dutchmen probably would not murder us.

But could we escape? It seemed impossible. We lay in the darkness on the log floor, bound securely.

An interval went by. There was a stir outside. Thumping. More voices. The door opened. Peter Stuyvesant came in. He stood, balanced upon his wooden leg and regarded us in the light of a candle held aloft. Eyed us as though we were some monstrosities; poked at us with the peg of his leg; and turned and stumped back to the doorway.

And in the doorway then, I saw Wolf Turber standing! Turber, in his black cloak, his white shirt gleaming beneath it. His sardonic gaze upon us.

The thing struck us with such surprise and horror that neither Alan nor I moved, or spoke. The door was left open. Turber and Stuyvesant sat at a table. The candlelight showed them plainly. There seemed now only one other man in the room—some trusted patrolman, no doubt.

Turber spoke this contemporary Dutch. They conversed. We could hear them, but could not understand a word.

What they said, never will be disclosed. Unrecorded history, this! A furtive, hidden incident—who was there ever to record it? Did Stuyvesant think Turber some magician? Or just a rich adventurer?

A bargain was struck. From a bag Turber produced jewels. And coins, and chunks of gold. He piled them on the table in the candlelight. He and Stuyvesant drank from their goblets to seal the bargain. Stuyvesant gathered up the treasure and stuffed it in the pockets of his great-coat.

Turber came in to us. He bent down. "If you speak or move, I'll have them kill you now." He chuckled. "Say good-bye to Nanette—quite a little fortune I paid for her, but she's worth it."

He lifted up Nanette. He untied her thongs. She cried out—just once.

"Don't be frightened, child. I won't hurt you."

Alan and I were straining at our bonds.

"Quiet, you fools!" We had helplessly tried to menace him with words.

He led Nanette from the room. The door closed upon us. We could hear Stuyvesant leaving. And then Turber taking Nanette away. His voice reached us:

"Don't be frightened, child."

There was silence.

Another interval passed. There were again guards in the room outside. I whispered: "Alan, it must be nearly dawn."

We had no idea. There were spaces in the outer log walls where the morticed filling had fallen away. But only blackness showed.

In the adjoining room there was candlelight, and the drowsy voices of the Dutchmen.

"Alan, what's that?"

A thud had sounded; something striking the roof over our heads. Then another. Off in the woods there was a shout. A war-whoop! And other thuds. A rain of arrows falling upon the roof and the side of the little fort.

An Indian attack! The Dutchmen in the adjoining room made short work of getting out of this isolated building. They did not come in even to look at us. They decamped into the woods, running for the village stockade.

We were left alone. Helpless!

The rain of arrows kept on. We could hear the Indians shouting, but they did not advance.

The dawn was coming. Or was it the dawn? A red glow showing through the log walls. Red and yellow. I smelled smoke! Alan coughed with a sudden choking.

The little log blockhouse was being bombarded with flaming arrows. It was on fire, filling up with smoke which already was choking us!

CHAPTER XV

THE RESCUE

LEA and San—after Alan and Lentz left them—kept watch in the tower. They talked together in their own language.

"How long do you think, brother, that they will be gone?"

"Until dawn perhaps. We can only hope for the best. Alan is resourceful—he got you away from Turber, Lea."

They could not guess what Alan and Lentz would do to rescue Nanette and me. They discussed Lentz. A fellow of their own Time-world. Their father had always put great trust in him. But Lentz had known Turber there. Was he a traitor now? A fellow in the pay of Turber? There had been several little things which Alan had brought to light—things to make them suspicious of Lentz. And they knew Alan did not trust him.

The hours passed. The forest was a black wall of silence about the tower. Lea often stood in the doorway, staring out. Small, graceful figure in flowing blue robe and golden hair. We had seen her on the television like that—our first sight of her.

San would not be still. As always

when the tower was at rest in a strange Time-world, he constantly paced the room; peering alternately from each of its windows; always within a few feet of the tower controls so that at any hostile sign outside, in a second or two the tower would speed away.

Time dragged by. Lea grew increasingly worried. Alan should be back by now.

"If he would have taken me," she said. "You remember, San, when we were here once before? There was an old chief—Silver Water, you remember? I could have got him then to help me try for Turber in one of Turber's passings. But you would not let me."

"You are over-bold, Lea." San shrugged. "I am helpless—always here with the tower."

"I could, tonight, have enlisted a band of these Indians," she said. "They worshiped me for a goddess—the 'God of Magic,' old Silver Water called the tower."

The Indians had been prostrate before the tower, that other night, and from its steps Lea had talked to them, while San watched at the controls.

"That was one thing," he said. "Safe enough. But to have you leave—to-night—off in these woods to try and find your friendly, gullible Indians—too dangerous, Lea. Alan knew it. He was right."

She presently mounted the tower, while San remained alert below. From the top she could see the Turber camp fire. And the Indian fire to the southeast.

Silence. And then, far away to the south where the pale-face city held the southern tip of the island, Lea thought she heard a shot. Then another. But they were very faint.

Dark spread of silent woods! What

was going on out there? The shots were Alan firing at Lentz when we discovered his treachery. But Lea could not know that.

The Hudson River shone in the starlight. Lea saw a huge Indian canoe moving south toward the glow of light which marked the location of the Turber aero. It was one of the canoes bringing in the Turber treasure. But that, too, she did not know.

She went down again and joined San. They waited through what seemed another interminable period. "We must leave at dawn," said San.

But Lea shook her head. "We will not leave until we know Turber has left—and Alan has failed."

And there was the chance that Alan and Lentz would be in the woods, and return at last, unsuccessful.

"We cannot abandon them, San."

They both suddenly felt that the venture was doomed to failure.

"San! Did you hear that?"

They were at one of the windows. A cautious call had come from the woods. A low hail.

"Lea!" It came again. "Lea! Don't start the tower! I'm coming."

LENTZ'S voice! They both recognized it. Lea went to the doorway. San was alert at the controls with his gaze on her.

"Wait, San." She gestured. "Wait! I see him."

Lentz appeared from a thicket near by.

"Lea?"

"Yes, Lentz. Where is Alan?"

"I'm coming in. Don't start the tower." He approached. "Disaster, Lea. We could do nothing. Alan was killed by Turber."

Her heart went cold. She stood on the steps. Lentz was alone. He came

up the steps, into the tower room. There was blood on his right hand; one of its fingers was mangled. He held out the wounded hand.

He said: "Don't start us yet, San. I want to talk to you. I've been hurt—Turber shot me."

They stood with him in the middle of the room. For that instant the tower controls were neglected. Lentz held out his wounded hand for inspection. His other hand was behind him. It came up over his head. He struck with a dagger at San.

A swift blow, but Lea was quicker. She shoved at him. The blow missed, and San was upon him. And Lea leaped at him also, fighting desperately. They bore him down. His wounded hand was a handicap. The dagger was in his awkward left hand. San fought for it as they rolled on the floor with Lea bending over them.

A brief struggle. San twisted and got the dagger, stabbed with it. Lentz gave a shuddering cry and relaxed.

San climbed to his feet, white and shaken. Lea was trembling.

"Got him, Lea. Accursed traitor."

San's first thought was the controls. Lea stopped him.

"Wait! How do we know Alan is dead? A lie, perhaps, what Lentz told us."

They went to the windows. There was no one in sight. A groan from Lentz brought them back. He lay, gruesome on the floor, with the knife in him and a red stain widening. But he was not dead. Lea bent over him.

"Lea—I want to—tell you the truth."

He died in a moment, but before he died he gasped out the truth of what had happened. He had lurked in the woods and seen us captured by the Dutchmen. Had followed us—himself like an Indian, for he was

skilled in woodcraft. He had been here before with Turber, laying plans to get the treasure. He knew these woods well.

He had seen us finally thrown into the fort with half a dozen Dutchmen left to guard us. Then he had gone to Turber. Had told what happened. Turber had set off to see Stuyvesant. Lentz had come back to the tower. If he had killed San, he would perhaps have killed Lea also, and escaped with the tower.

But now he lay dead. He gasped his last words of the confession. Blood gushed from his lungs.

LEA turned away. There was barely time for her to tell San what Lentz had said — they were standing at the doorway—when they became aware of dark figures in the shadowed glade near at hand! Again San would have flung the tower into Time. But again Lea stopped him.

Figures of savages were out there—not menacing, but prostrate upon the ground at the edge of the near-by thickets. It was so dark by the forest edge—the figures were dark and motionless—that Lea and San might not have seen them had not there come a low wail. Mournful cry! A prostrate savage placating this magic god of the forest. This strange tower, with a god and goddess in its doorway standing in this glade which the redskins well knew to be usually empty of such a vision.

Lea's thoughts were swift. Alan and I and Nanette were held by the Dutch in an isolated fort some two or three miles to the south. Lea could control these Indians. She had already proved her power upon one of their chieftains.

She murmured her plans to San. It was hardly a minute from the time

they had first seen the prostrate figures.

San stood alert, watching. Lea advanced to the top of the tower steps. She called in the Indian dialect: "Rise up, children of the forest. I would not hurt you. I bring you only good."

She descended the steps slowly. San called anxiously:

"Careful, Lea!"

"Yes, San. Stand on your feet, men of the forest."

Slowly she advanced upon them. Watchful.

They rose at the gesture of her upraised arms. Some ten of them— young braves prowling here in the forest, attracted by the tower's dim light.

They trembled before Lea. Savages of the year 1664! Well might they have thought her a goddess; white, fairylike creature with flowing blue robe and dangling golden tresses —and the Time-traveling tower behind her.

"I bring you commands," she said, "from the Spirit Land where your fathers hunt now in peace and happiness. You have a chieftain—a man of much power here in these woods. He is called Silver Water—name like a woman, but he is a man very old, and wise, and very good."

One of the Indians stepped forward. "I know him. His lodge—off there by the water of the dawn—not far."

He pointed to the southeast.

"I will go with you," she said. "Lead me. Be not afraid, young braves."

"Lea, come back!" San called.

She turned. "I'll be careful. No danger, San. Watch out for Turber."

She followed the Indians into the dark shadows of the forest.

BUT, Goddess of the Sun I have buried the hatchet with the pale-face intruders here." The old sachem was troubled. He sat by his camp fire with his braves about him. The East River flowed near by. The wigwams of his village stood along it—dark-coned shapes in the gloom. The curious women and children hovered in the background.

Lea stood straight and commanding with her back against a tree. The firelight painted her. She held her arms upraised.

"I am at peace here," the old Indian repeated. "The pale-face chief with the one live leg sat here at my fire and smoked the pipe of peace with me. And you would command me to break my oath—"

"No," she said. "There is one little fort, this side of the city. You know it."

"I know it," he said.

"And it is in your woods."

He nodded gravely. "Yes. They press always farther, these pale-face intruders. But I want no fighting. The white men are very good at killing—and I have heard this day that more of the pale-face ships are coming. One of my braves was in the city today. He came back drunk with firewater, but he had the tale."

"Have they ever broken their word with you?" she demanded.

"Yes—many times."

"Well, it is not my wish you should start any fighting. Merely frighten away the guards of the little fort."

"My braves," he said, "run wild when deeds of violence start. We want no killing."

"No," she agreed. "I will be careful of that."

Lea at last convinced him. There were two gods, and another goddess like herself, held in that little fort

by the Dutch. A score of braves and herself could go and frighten away the Dutchmen and rescue them. If they were left there—if evil came to them—then evil would fall upon all this forest.

He listened. Abruptly he stood up and flung his gray braids with a toss of his head; and wound his vivid blanket around him. Dignified, venerable figure. But he was afraid of Lea. Her curse upon these, his forests—his people—

"It shall be as you command. You shall have thirty of my braves. In a moment they will be ready."

THE little blockhouse stood in the trees on a rise of ground. Lea, with her Indians about her, moved silently through the underbrush. It was her intention to creep up and surprise the Dutch guards, and to overcome them without arousing the nearby village. The door of the blockhouse faced the other way. The building stood black and silent. Were we in there? Was any one in there? She did not know.

Without warning, taking Lea wholly by surprise, at the edge of the thickets the savages knelt abruptly and shot their arrows.

"Why—" Momentarily she lost her poise.

The young brave beside her drew her back behind a tree-trunk. It startled her. But she saw that he was reverential.

"We will go no farther," he said. "Drive them away."

The lust of battle abruptly swept over the young Indians. With the launching of the first arrow they seemed to forget Lea. The forest rang with their shouts. They spread out; creeping forward. And then with flint and steel bartered from the

pale-face, they set their arrows into flame. And launched them.

The young leader standing by Lea murmured: "They are running! See them go—off there—running for their village. The fort will burn."

* It was already burning. Dry walls and roof; the flaming arrows struck and caught the bark. Spots of spreading flame.

"Wait!" commanded Lea. "Enough!" She stopped them at last. The fort was blazing. The Dutchmen had decamped.

She added: "Come!" But the young Indians feared to advance; suddenly fearful of what they had done; the great pale-face village could pour out many wrathful men upon occasion.

"Then stay here," said Lea hurriedly.

SHE left them. She dashed across the short intervening space. She ran around the corner of the burning building. A prayer was in her heart that Alan and Nanette and I were inside and still safe.

She came to the door. It stood open. The room was full of smoke. Its candles gleamed dully; but she saw that the room was empty. And saw a door across it.

She rushed in. The smoke choked her. She held her breath.

The door between the rooms was not fastened. She flung it open. Saw, in the yellow glare of the burning roof—saw Alan and me lying bound and helpless.

We called: "Lea!"

She came—saw the ropes binding us. She dashed back to get a knife lying on the table by the candles. We rolled so that she might cut our ropes. We were all gasping in the smoke. She helped us up; we could

barely stand at first, but with her help we staggered out into the blessed cool air of the night.

The building was blazing all over its side and roof. To the south, by the city stockade, the Dutchmen were shouting, but none of them advanced. We ran back to Lea's waiting Indians. There seemed still a chance that Turber's aero might still be there. The Indians led us to the spot. But it was gone, and the camp was deserted.

Then we crossed swiftly east to the tower. It was daylight when we left the braves, prostrate before the tower as it melted into a phantom and vanished.

We were safe—all but Nanette. Of what use to me, this safety? Nanette, to me of all the world most dear, was gone. And this time I had a premonition that she was lost to me forever.

CHAPTER XVI

WHICH THE READER MAY SKIP IF HE CHOOSES

I THINK it advantageous to my narrative now to set down a few scientific facts. The laws, for instance, under which our Time-traveling tower operated. The Indians of 1664 thought the tower was magic. But it was based upon solid science.

The laws of Time and Space—the true aspect of the Material Universe—all this is, in our age of 1945, imperfectly understood. So I set down here a few succinct truths. Those of you who care to ponder them may do so. You will find that the scientific aspect of my narrative is much clearer. Those of a different turn of mind may pass over this brief chapter.

The basis of the Material Universe is Energy. Energy we can also call by another name—Change. Everything exists because it is changing. The living cell feeds itself and grows; multiplies itself; dies and decays; turns to other forms, liquid and gas—and is not lost, but reconverted. The rocks were gas, then liquid, then solid. The wind and water erodes them—they break, they powder, they blow away, or wash away as dust, and come again in other forms of other things.

The atoms, the very electrons of all matter in the universe, are breaking down or building up. All changing. All are nothing but manifestations of Energy. And Matter itself? Take a fragment of solid gold—we find it built of loosely massed molecules, all in movement; and each molecule a group of agitated atoms; and each atom, whirling electrons and a nucleus—infinately tiny things to which we give these arbitrary names—things which in themselves in their essence are nothing at all save Energy!

There is no mass. Nothing of solidity! Whirlpools—vortexes of nothingness! Of such unsolid stuff you who read this are built. And your home, and your city, and the Earth under you, and all the stars of the Heavens!

At the basis of all this, also, is unceasing change of position. Every tiny fragment of everything is restless—and every thing, in its entirety, is in motion. We move in space about our tiny Earth. Our Earth whirls us all along; and the Sun sweeps onward, dragging the Earth, itself following some distant Star, which with other Stars is going somewhere. We know all this, now in 1945.

We know, too, that nothing has a continuous existence. Your body, as

you now sit reading what you may feel are idle theories, at one instant is existing and at the next is blotted out. And lives again another instant. A changed body, just a little different in every tiny essence of your being from what it was before.

Like a motion picture. There is nothing difficult to grasp in that thought. We see a motion picture as a continuous flow of movement; but we know that in reality the seeming movement is merely a rapid change from one still picture to the next.

So with all our Material Universe. It is as though Time, like a whirling knife-blade, were slashing through us—blotting us out, letting us live only in the progressive instants between the whirling blades.

“TIME” is the factor of all this which we find most unnatural to envisage in its true aspect. I would have you imagine now, what I might term the physical aspect of Time. Consider it, for instance, as an all-pervading etheric fluid. Consider it strewn in a line from the Beginning to the End. Our minds are so limited that we must conceive everything in terms of tangibility—even the intangible. So I would have you picture Time as a stream of imponderable, invisible fluid. Imagine it in shape so that it could lie in some gigantic pipe—perfectly straight—of some inconceivable length. We put the Beginning and the End to bound it.

This Time-fluid, then, you must picture as being at rest—the one thing of all things which does not move nor change. It lies there—forever.

But do not forget this pipe-line of Time-fluid in which all this is happening! Let us cling to simple physical analogies. We must imagine, for

instance, that the Time-fluid is progressively of different physical character along all its length from its Beginning to its End. Like water in a pipe—hot at one end, cold at the other, with every gradation of temperature in between. Or, to be just a trifle closer to fact, perhaps, the stream of Time might be imagined as a beam of light—red at one end and violet at the other—with every tint and shade merging along the way.

Something then—like a Thought—is put into the pipe-line of Time at the Beginning. If you have conceived the fluid of Time as being hot at the Beginning—then imagine that this foreign, intangible substance which has been placed there is the same temperature. Because of that, let us say, it can remain there. But only for an instant! Because the foreign substance instantly desires to change its character. It desires, let us say, to become a bit cooler. It wants to reexist; to perpetuate itself in changed form.

The fluid of Time at the Beginning will not tolerate anything cooler. Will not tolerate any change at all. So it shifts a changed replica of the restless thing along a bit. An event has occurred. A new thing exists, beside the old thing. Both lie there side by side—and the difference between their aspects is the change. Also, it is movement.

Not the movement of something tangible as we are wont to conceive it. That is a fallacy; there is no such movement—nor is there anything of absolute tangibility to move! The aspect of the old thing, compared—like a motion picture—to the aspect of the new thing beside it, is what we call movement.

It is also an interval of Time. And that interval—that pseudo-movement

—that tangible difference between intangible things—is all that our human senses can perceive. They lie inert in Time. But we are aware of the progressive difference between them. Upon it we have built our conception of Substance, Matter. We are ourselves a part of this ceaseless change—and to a phantom every other phantom is solid!

I need not pursue the analogy of the Time-fluid. You can conceive the building Universe—every instant reborn: leaving itself lying there in Time, and changed replicas of itself existing progressively in the new positions.

WIDEN your imagination now. You can fancy Time like a giant ribbon of motion-picture film of infinite length. The whole story lies there upon it, inert, motionless, unchanging.

Our consciousness is created. It has a certain vibratory rate—certain characteristics by which its energy is made manifest. There is only one portion of Time—one instant of Time—to which that vibratory rate is compatible. Time sorts us out; starts each consciousness in its proper niche.

We become thus, part of the Great Pattern. We are aware only of the Time-intervals between our changes. And so it seems to us that we move forward in Time—or that Time ticks past us, as you will. But in reality, upon the great Record of Time, is engraven as it were a myriad pictures of us in our progressive changes—and we have the consciousness to be aware of them. Not as pictures of stillness; but of change; of pseudo-motion from one picture to another.

I will repeat: the Record of Time—the whole Great Story—stands complete. Engraven upon Time, for

always. And always it has been there, since the Beginning.

The Time-traveling tower and everything within the sphere of what might be termed its magnetic field was altering in its essential physical and chemical characteristics. We were, let me say, changing our inherent vibratory rate. And thus Time was thrusting us along—toward that portion of the Time-scroll with which we could be compatible.

Is that clear? I trust so. To me it seems no more abstruse than the tuning in of a radio receiver.

No more of this! But if you have pondered it, you will find much upon which your imagination may roam.

There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy. The bard who said that spoke truer than he knew.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ARRIVAL

TURBER took Nanette back to the aero. A dozen canoes had arrived now, the treasure was nearly all loaded aboard. The Indian legends here had told of it—these chests buried on the shore of the water, up the river a day's journey. How it got there no one can say. Left by some Mongol outlaw, perhaps—of that Eastern civilization which was here centuries before and which merged gradually into these savages the white man called Indians.

Turber had laid his plans. The renegade Dutchman — one Melyn from the Staten Island region—had been supplied with money by Turber. He had purchased trinkets—had bribed the Indians—organized and fitted out an expedition.

"And now we have it, little Nanette," said Turber. "You will love

me for all this wealth and luxury and power that I will lavish upon you."

The aero was everywhere littered with the treasure. Piles of broken, moldy chests; scattered jewels strewn in heaps in the various cabins. Jewels fashioned in strange devices of beaten gold and silver; anklets of gold, garlanded with insets of rubies and emeralds; a heap of sapphires glowing like the tropic sea at night; gemmed bangles of a myriad designs; great metal vases, ornate with hydra-headed images—religious trappings of a heathen age, and fabulous Eastern riches.

The aero started almost as soon as Turber and Nanette came aboard. It flashed forward in Time; and flew slowly in Space. Not far in Space—south down the Hudson River, across the harbor until it poised over Staten Island.

Turber sat with Nanette in the control room. She heard Josefa's voice, but Turber ordered the woman away. Bluntnose was at the controls. How Josefa explained our escape Nanette never knew. Perhaps by blaming it upon the Indian—her word was as good as his. Turber with his treasure, and having recovered Nanette, was in too good a humor to bother with probing it.

Nanette knew that they were upon the last of the voyage now. Headed for the Great City of New York in the Time-world of 2445. Their permanent home.

"No more traveling, Nanette. We will conquer the world, you and I, and rule it together."

Nanette was frightened, but she would not let him see it. Alone now. Alan and I, she thought, were gone from her forever.

It was a brief trip. They stopped, just for a moment, in the year 1779. It was a fairly large settlement here

now on Staten Island, and the aero, selecting a safe landing place, came down in a field near it.

A Colonial settlement, they called it; but it was in the hands of the enemy. Sir William Howe had landed in the Narrows two years before, and now held all the island.

It was night again when the aero stopped.

NANETTE sat in the control room and attentively listened to the new voices. All English now.

"Wolf Turber, we failed—"

"Yes?" His quiet voice was unruffled. "Did the sloop get in?"

"Last week. I have been here every night since—you come late, to-night of all nights! They're fighting over in the marshes—this traitorous Mercer and his men."

Turber interrupted: "About the sloop, Atwood! Who cares about Mercer?"

"Gad! You can brush me aside, but I've had a hellish time."

"All right, Tony, I believe you."

"It's well you should. I had thought if you did not come to-night, by to-morrow Mercer's troops might be here. And where would I be? Not here—that I promise you. As it is. Sir William does not think any too much of me. He called me somewhat of an ugly name last week. I think I am insulted."

"Well, you didn't get the gold?"

"No. The sloop got in—ninety days from the Bermudas in weather of the vilest sort. And then the blockade—but it got through. I have Somerset's letter. Your money was spent—"

Turber laughed. "I fancy it was!"

"—spent in what I warrant must have been no less than a digging up of all the beach on Cooper's Island. Treasure there was none." He added: "I did what I could. I hope this is

your last passing, egad, it had better be, and take me with you. They'll be sending me on a still longer journey if I stay around here."

They took him aboard. The aero hung over Staten Island and sped forward again in Time. Through the 1800's. The 1900's. And then, while the huge city grew under it, sped on five hundred years farther. It took only half an hour.

Turber said: "We are here." The aero had settled—a phantom settling down in a shadowy city. It rested on that same rise of ground on Staten Island which in 1945 held the Turber Hospital.

It flashed to a halt in 2445. Through the windows Nanette heard the tumultuous roar of the monstrous city. Turber led her from the aero.

CHAPTER XVIII

TURBER'S ULTIMATUM

ALAN and I, in the tower with Lea and San, were simultaneously heading for the same Time-place to which Turber now took Nanette. We did not know that Turber stopped in 1779. It would have availed us nothing. But we did know his final destination. The knowledge was poor consolation. Turber was practically impregnable in that giant city. Old Powl had said it: we knew that Lea and San thought so. All our efforts had been to keep Turber from taking Nanette there. It was his final stronghold.

As our tower sped forward in Time from the forests of little New Amsterdam, Alan and I found ourselves again with the barrier of language between us and Lea and San. Lea was beginning to talk a little. Her ability to learn was far in excess of what was normal to Alan and me. Already

she seemed to understand much of what we said. But it was still an awkward barrier.

We made them understand that we would stop in the giant city. San would land us there at a time similar to Turber's arrival.

Alan said: "We'll go to the authorities, Ed. They will be intelligent, scientific people. They'll understand this tower — it won't be magic to them. We'll make them organize an expedition against Turber. Rescue Nanette—get her back safely."

My heart was heavy. It was all of rational plan we could make. But that giant city! What new conditions with which we would have to cope! A new-civilization, all strange to us.

Lea said: "Yes. That best." She indicated 2445 A. D. on the dial. "You and Alan there. San and I got to—"

She indicated the year 5000 A. D. Alan knew what she meant. She and San would make a hurried trip on to that Time when the city was in ruins, and would search in the ruins for that super-powerful weapon. They would get it and bring it back to us.

Lea added: "Tell them—not yield to Turber. Weapon coming—Lea and San bring it in tower."

We sped forward—a trip of much less than an hour. The Indian forests melted away. The city flowed up around the tower. Central Park was here. We saw the city flow over it. We saw huge streets about us. Then a roof over us, with our tower set in a monstrous metal street.

Lea shook our hands. "Good-by, Alan—until we come with weapon."

The tower lurched to a halt. A surge of noises flooded in through the windows. The noise of the huge city. And there were shouts of human voices. And dazzling lights

everywhere. Turber was here in this same city, now, with Nanette. We were to make our last desperate play against Turber here.

San flung the door open. Alan and I leaped from the tower steps. Behind us, the tower flashed into a phantom and was gone.

THE city street was a roaring torrent of voices, human and electrical; a confusion of strange sounds and stranger sights. The street was solid metal. Traffic levels rose in tiers one above the other. Vehicles were passing: scurrying cars on wheels; a monorail hanging from a trellis, with dangling cars showing as a string of lights high overhead. And a great translucent spread of roof like glass above it all.

A blare of blue and yellow lights. A moving sidewalk on one of the lower tiers was jammed with human figures. They craned down to see the commotion we were causing.

The empty street space showed a mangled vehicle which had evidently been too close when the tower materialized. Twisted, blackened metal; and there were three human bodies lying dead in the street.

"Stand still, Ed! Let them take us!"

I clung to Alan. A crowd of strangely garbed figures rushed at us. But they did not approach too close; a ring of them, milling about; shouting—but too fearful to seize us.

We stood confused. Out of a million new impressions, my mind grasped so few! Mechanisms everywhere; gleaming mirrors with moving images; traffic lights and signals; clanking, clattering mechanisms; movement everywhere.

I saw fifty feet up the tiers of sidewalks, a street of open-faced shops with merchandise on display.

The narrow viaducts were a lace-work of metal overhead. The city roof above them glowed with light—I think it was daytime.

Alan said: "There ought to be an official."

The milling crowd was mostly men. All garbed in sober colors—black and grays. Hatless, with close-clipped bullet heads. Close-fitting trousers with legs like jointed stove-pipes; short black jackets. Women with dark skirts like inverted funnels; hair close-clipped.

An official in white appeared. A roaring electrical megaphone on his chest magnified his voice. The crowd scattered obediently. He waded through it. He stood near us and roared at the congesting traffic. A halted swinging train above us, moved along. Signal lights flashed. The tangle of vehicles began struggling to sort itself out. Other officials—all in white uniforms—showed on the bridges, and in small rostrums on the different levels. A magnetic crane swung out into the air. It seized an offending vehicle—lifted it clear of the jam.

The officer gripped us. "Come with me."

English, readily understandable, yet wholly strange. I cannot set it down here. I cannot approximate its swift brevity—its suggestion of eliminated syllables; its close-clipped intonations. Compared with it, our own speech was ancient, flowing and flowery.

"Come—"

"We're friends," said Alan hastily. "Don't hurt us—take us to your government headquarters. You can do that, can't you?"

The fellow stared. Astonished, I think, at Alan's strangely antiquated English.

"They have already sent for you," he said. "Come."

He led us swiftly away. The crowd stared after us.

Into a small tunnel. A lighted car whirled us aloft. It passed endless floors—or streets, or tiers. People everywhere. The car stopped its vertical movement; it rolled sidewise upon a track. Our captor spoke into a mouth-piece on his chest. I heard the answering voice.

"Room 400—tier 8 Tappan Government House, Westchester, Section 6 N. W."

"Yes," he said. He repeated it to the operator of our car who sat at a switch.

The microscopic voice added: "Bring them."

"Coming now."

IUR car whirled off, along a track; went over bridges of glaring, tumultuous streets; through vaulted passages of buildings where behind transparent panes I could see what seemed busy commercial offices; up a long incline until I fancied we were almost under the roof—

Looming spires were now beneath us—streets and house-tops; then a great building through which we plunged along a lighted passage. Rooms with busy workers were everywhere.

This giant beehive!

I heard once above the mingled commotion of sounds: "Turberites expect to buy city—" A broadcasting voice; and as we sped over a bridge, dangling now from a single overhead track, I saw in the blur of light far beneath us a giant oblong area of light, with moving letters. A news-bulletin. I read:

Four Hundred and Fifty
Thousand Billions—Wolf Tur-

ber's price—payable in minted gold, silver, platinum and ancient jewels.

And then:

Council of Ten in Session.
Turberites' Ultimatum expected soon.

We flashed into a black vacuum tube. It was a trip of perhaps ten minutes. We emerged into an area where the city was less congested. Descended to a trestle near the ground. The roof was lower. In places it was gone. I saw the daylight—a gray overcast summer day. This was the morning of June 12, 2445 A. D.

Alan whispered: "This must be about Tarrytown. There's the river."

To the left we saw the Hudson. A solid ground level of metal buildings spread beneath us. Only the streets were roofed over here. Streets were laid out in orderly parallels. Our single car sped above them, flashing over switches.

I saw that there were no docks along the river. No sign of boats; occasional low covered bridges crossed over to the other shore which was solid with houses.

"Say, look behind us," Alan murmured.

A glare of light was back there. The roof seemed nearly a thousand feet up; tracks and viaducts and traffic levels came from it like a tangle of exposed veins and arteries spreading out over this wider northern area.

Our guard said: "Here."

The car stopped within a towering building near the river. We emerged into a lighted metal corridor. Guards passed us along it; we went through great swinging baize doors.

We stood in the presence of the government council.

I THINK most strange of all this age, was its rapidity. Its machine-made precision permeating every detail. Within half an hour, at this council of the Anglo-Saxon Republic, of which Great New York and Great London were twin capitals, we were understood and accepted; the part we might play in this crisis Turber was precipitating was grasped by these leaders.

I recall now our amazement at the dispatch with which fundamentals were reached. The arrival of our tower had already been investigated; witnesses in some local court near the scene had been interrogated; the reports transmitted to scientific authorities—and the whole lay now before this council.

Turber had carefully guarded his aero in that portion of the city which he owned. It had never been seen by the governmental authorities. But its existence was suspected and understood as an explanation of the presence of Turber's rabble.

Within half an hour the main details of what we had to tell were drawn from us by swift questions. There were no by-paths. No astonishment; no theories. Half a dozen men of science arrived shortly after we were brought in. They listened; they stated the scientific laws—well known in this age—which made credible what we had to say.

It was a narrow room of metallic, vaultlike aspect. Ten men sat around a table littered with documents, reports and summaries of the Turber affair; and the more recently compiled data on us. Mirrors and grids with moving images of distant scenes were on the walls; ovals of windows and a swinging door disclosed an ad-

jacent room humming with the sounds of instruments; messengers passed in and out. There was a table in a corner with instruments and two intent operators.

The business concerning us was dispatched with a celerity that left us both confused. The interrogation of us was suddenly nearly over. The president of the Great New York Branch of Anglo-Saxonia demanded of Alan:

"You say your tower will return with a weapon for us to use against Turber?"

"Yes. That is, we hope so."

"What sort of a weapon?"

"We don't know. A projector—"

"Electronic, probably." He was obviously greatly interested.

I said: "But you must have such weapons here."

"No. Our world aerial power makes them inoperative. There was a class of weapons up to the years around 2000, called explosives. And then came the electronic weapons. We have none of them. They would not operate—and war itself is obsolete—"

Was it? I doubted that, with the menace of Turber here. The president seemed to read my thoughts. He said:

"We are business men. We know nothing of war." His grave face clouded with anxiety. He repeated as though to himself: "We know nothing of war."

I regarded Alan. Then I said: "We have come here to have you help us. And to help you. My friend's sister is held by Turber—"

An expedition against Turber to release Nanette. We urged it.

The president said impatiently: "You know nothing of what you talk. That is utterly impossible of success."

Alan said: "We know nothing of your conditions—that's true. But we must release my sister. Our purpose is the same as yours—if we can kill Turber—his Empire, as you call it, would go to pieces with his death. That's obvious from what you say."

We listened while the council went on with its business. Gradually it was growing upon us how impregnable was Turber in this Time-world. This was only five hundred years in the future of our own world of 1945! And less than eight hundred years in the future of that little New Amsterdam! My mind went back to those forests with their roving Indians. This same Space which now was this giant city! Eight hundred years is not a long time in history.

What a stupendous change!

THE Council was discussing the aerial power-vibrations broadcast over the world from the main power plant in Scotland. The city comptroller said: "The Turberites refused to-day to pay the rental fees." He gestured to the table before him. "Here is the report—a protest from the Great London office. The Turberites are pirating the power now. Stealing it—the Wolves!

"How can we stop them? We cannot, without war."

My mind clung to Nanette. Cut off from us. No chance to get to her—it would start the warfare, which of everything else I understood at once was what this Council feared. There were mirrors here—and hundreds more in the adjoining room—picturing present scenes all over the city, and over the world. But none from the Turber area—that was insulated against them.

How changed was this world from ours of 1945! Changed in every smallest detail. Our familiar nations

were gone. White, Yellow and Black nations now, in a trinity of alliance. The White Nation was headed by Anglo-Saxonia.

It was a vast world of business unified by transportation. There were no ships, it seemed, on the seas, save perhaps locally in very small areas. No great railroads. The age of the air.

Power was universally distributed by aerial vibrations. It was broadcast by a central plant in Scotland. Transformers were at Niagara, the Iguazu in South America, and Victoria Falls in Africa. The power was tapped by airliners; by the city trains; by the factories which now were spread over every rural district; it operated all lights—all motors down to the smallest.

THERE was now spread before us, in terms of this super-modern world, the culmination of Turber's plans. There was a Turber Empire here now.

He had brought, with many trips of his aero, a constant stream of villains gathered from the Past. How many thousands of them, we never knew. And brought his treasure.

The city here knew him first as a wealthy man with a business organization, buying up small sections of the city. His wealth and his power grew, until now, ten years after his appearance in this Time-world, he was a figure gigantic. He and his followers—his organization—owned now all the southern area of the city. In ancient terms: Staten Island—New York Harbor—a portion of Brooklyn—and adjacent New Jersey.

Outside the city the Turberites owned and had colonized a strip of land some twenty miles wide by six hundred miles long. Bought with gold—like a gigantic railroad right-

of-way. The strip ran from the New Jersey edge of the city southward through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and into the Carolina Mountains. All ancient terms, these, of course.

An agricultural section; and factories; and mines. A wall of metal and masonry, huge as the old Great Wall of China, hemmed in this Turber Colony. Food and all the supplies necessary to life were produced by Turberites for their section of Great New York. They had organized their own air transportation.

And now, the Turberites were ready to show their true colors! They stopped paying for the use of the aerial power. That was just to-day—June 12, 2445. They had flung up insulation a week ago—against the government news mirrors. They demanded—the demand had come to-day—that the city sell itself for the sum of four hundred and fifty thousand billions of dollars. The government was to sell for this sum, incredibly too small; to pay the citizens, each for his proportionate property ownership, what would be a mere pittance; and order every one to leave the city. In one transaction, they were to abandon this world capital; disorganize its business; fling thirty million people into unemployment!

It was unthinkable. And it had given to the world a hint of the real menace of Turber. This was the beginning of his intended ruling of the world. By money power, and by force of arms, he meant to extend his despotism over all humanity.

We heard it all discussed, now at this Council meeting. And I saw these men, gigantic governmental Captains of Industry. Men of business, nothing more. Business men, trying to meet a crisis of war and

handling it by business principles. An impossibility!

THE president's thin face was haggard and harassed. His stiff circular coat was rumpled; he passed a hand over his face and dropped his close-clipped gray head. An old man, utterly tired. But in a moment he looked up again. He spoke, more vehemently than I had heard any of these men speak before.

"We must learn what weapons the Turberites have. If he is to attack us—when? We have plenty of men—the city police army—"

"Armed how?" asked Alan.

"With the needle swords. And the steel slingshots—our men are very expert—and they have projectors of compressed air, and sleeping gas."

Primitive weapons, modernized! My heart sank.

"How many of the police are available?" I asked.

"We have some two hundred thousand here. And Great London will send us by liner all the police we need."

"Are your air-liners armed?" Alan asked.

"No. How could they be? Except with short-range slings."

Another man said: "If Turber cuts off the incoming supply ships—if his ships are armed—our city here will starve in a day."

A commotion in the adjoining room interrupted us. A messenger came out.

"A communication from Turber!" The president read the document.

"It has come!" He spoke with a strained hush to his voice. "He gives us but half an hour. An ultimatum! He says we vacillate like children all this morning, and give him no answer to his business proposal. Either we accept his purchase price—and

our citizens must start leaving the city within thirty minutes—or he will begin war! We must tell him now. He gives us just sixty seconds to answer!"

Some one said huskily: "We shall have to yield."

The president looked at Alan. "That projector which your tower went to get—if we had it we could ask that the world-power be shut off. Then we could use it, against Turber."

No one answered him. He added: "Do you think your tower will bring it?"

"Yes," said Alan.

Messages were flooding in from the other world governments. Demands for details. They passed ignored.

The president stood up; his slim figure wavered. "I think—I think gentlemen, we should not yield. If you are against defending ourselves—defending the world from these wolves, stand up now and say so."

No one moved. He turned suddenly: his voice rang out:

"Tell the Wolves we are not afraid."

He stood listening for the answer. It came within a few seconds. Clattering messages from the southern—the Manhattan section of the city.

Turber's attack had started!

CHAPTER XIX

THE BATTLE OF GREAT NEW YORK

HISTORY will record that the battle of Great New York began on the morning of June 12, 2445 A. D. For three days it raged. I can give but fragmentary pictures. It whirled Alan and me into a maelstrom. I recall the morning of June 13. A day of the

battle was passed. Inconceivable events of horror! Inconceivable ramifications of gruesome tragedy!

I recall that that morning Alan and I sat before a mirror-grid in the Westchester section of this monstrous beehive city. The fighting was farther south. We could see its ghastly details mirrored on a score of grids around us. We had been in it at times. And snatched food and sleep. But we were worn now to the verge of exhaustion. And worn with fear. The Turberites could not be stopped.

And Nanette? How could we dare hope that we would ever see Nanette again amid this torrent of killing?

The Hoboken area across the lower river had been the scene of bloody fighting all afternoon of June 12, the evening, and through the night. The Manhattan-Hudson terraces and most of the network of Hudson bridges down near the lower end were held now by the Turberites. They had penetrated through all the corridors of the Hoboken area south of the power rooms. Factory rooms and offices were here, shops and storage warehouses of local food supplies. The Turberites now swarmed them. The terminus of the north-south traffic artery on the Manhattan side of the river tunnel was taken from us.

The city traffic system of internal railways was long since paralyzed. It added to the panic of the people who were caught in the city the morning before, when the fighting so abruptly started, and who had not yet been able to get away. A resident population of thirty millions now in this monstrous city! Ten million more as a daily average of visitors. They, too, were caught in the maelstrom of the panic. And another thirty million who commuted in to work.

Millions had escaped now. Every moment black streams of them came pouring out. But transportation was hourly becoming more difficult.

Inconceivable ramifications of tragedy! The mirrors before us pictured it in a myriad horrible details. My gaze caught one of them and clung, fascinated.

It was a vaulted corridor, with tiers of levels from the ground up to the thousand-foot roof. The loading platforms of the shuttles which normally whirled local travelers away to the main departing stages of the Northbound Local Coast Flyers were on these levels; forty of them, one above the other, on each side of the corridor. The shuttle cars stood ready on their tracks; the escalators still were in movement.

A tremendous throng of people was struggling here, trying to get onto the shuttles which occasionally were departing. The Hudson River—nearly closed over here by the ground tracks, surface viaducts and the network of bridges to the Hoboken terraces—showed occasionally in patches of sullen, yellow-stained water.

The crowd milled and fought for place in the inadequate cars. Every level, every smallest bridge, was thronged. From a line of doorways and trans-corridors up near the roof a horde of advancing Turberites appeared—a mob of bloodstained villains with the blood-lust upon them. They came clambering and leaping through a hundred doors and windows; they spread down the inclines, the stairways, running over the spider-bridges. Within a moment they seemed everywhere.

I saw a low, unroofed kiosk upon the edge of a sidewalk level. Tables and chairs were there, as though this were a street cafe. It was black with men and women, thrust in there by

the press of others outside. The furniture was overturned.

From twenty feet overhead a dozen figures of Turberites leaped a rail and plunged down. Men in torn and blood-soaked uniforms of red cloth, grotesque with epaulets and golden braid. Their swords flashed. The little cafe was in a moment strewn with the mutilated dead and dying. Some of the bodies went like plummets over the low rails. I could see the white splashes as they struck the sullen river.

THERE was a mirror giving a close detail in another section—a room in the honeycomb of cells that occupied an area of southeast Manhattan. The Turberites had reached there now in a drive for the great air-stage where the transcontinental liners were departing.

Our police forces still held the roof-tracks and all the arteries of official travel up there; and the subterranean arteries were still ours all over Manhattan. But in the metal honeycomb of squalid living quarters which in my day was called the lower East Side the Turberites had forced us back.

There was, on my mirror, this chance close detail of a single room. A woman in it, thin and pallid and frail; wasted frame—a woman old and haggard at thirty, with wisps of yellow hair turning white. In metal bunks her brood of children were huddled. Cut off here in their home, lost and forgotten in the turmoil. The woman had barred her door—there were no windows; it seemed that perhaps her ventilator had ceased to operate; she huddled, gasping, with a baby against her breast.

The door burst inward. A savage who in a different age had stalked the forests of this same space stood ex-

pectantly upon the threshold. His painted face was grinning. Other faces behind him peered to watch. He bounded in; his tomahawk whirled. The woman mercifully went down at once; the children lay where he had thrown them in a gruesome little heap. He seized the baby, which still seemed alive. He held it aloft and gestured to his grinning, feathered companions. He tossed its white body toward the ceiling and flung the dripping tomahawk at the falling mark. The weapon cleaved the baby's head as it fell to the floor.

And there were other scenes, indescribable. Rooms of small factories. I saw one of them, where for this whole day a group of young girls had been trapped. The swinging viaduct leading from their doorway had fallen with the press of a fleeing mob; a girder had fallen, pinning their door so that they could not open it. They were trapped; and though the official safety emergency station in that area was still in our hands, it was too flooded with similar calls, and too disorganized, to heed this one.

A ROOM of young girls. And by some chance, when the Turberites advanced, a leering giant had peered through a narrow ventilator orifice and seen them. With his huge stone ax he hacked away at the ventilator. Others took his place when he was winded. They came through at last into the room—

A news-mirror beside us—one of the few circuits still in operation—flashed a message:

"Turber attacking the local ventilating power-house. To shut off our power—paralyze our ventilating system."

So, with that done, he could use his gas fumes! I had not heard of an attack at the ventilating power-house.

The one mentioned was in Lower Manhattan—local to that area. It was far underground.

The subterranean city was a vast catacomb with a depth everywhere of several hundred feet. We still held our sections of it.

"Alan! What will Central Headquarters do about that? Has it been moved yet? Central Headquarters moved?"

No one near us seemed to know. Every city function was disorganized. The government archives were at this moment being transported with difficulty from the financial area into new quarters beyond the Spuyten Duyvil flood gates. From the subterranean treasury vaults the tremendous gold reserve was being moved northward. All our instrument-room headquarters were being shifted to the northern outskirts. It was almost a flight—a rout. But our massed fighters in all the important corridors were still holding firm.

THE day wore on. We slept for a few hours, and awoke to find the situation immeasurably worse. San and Lea had not come. And now our tower Space was menaced! A mob of Turberites—there must have been ten thousand of them—had broken through our men in the tiers of Lower Manhattan. They swarmed there in all the vacant rooms and corridors and pedestrian viaducts. The lifting shafts were out of operation now; the moving sidewalks were stilled. They swarmed up the inclines, the emergency stairs and ladders.

The city forces were driven back, and the local machinery rooms, where the ventilating system of this area was controlled, fell to the Turberites. They had been after it all day. They smashed it. The air currents were stilled.

It was as though all this vital section of the city structure had ceased to breathe. The foul air pouring into the chemical vats was not renewed; it surged in for a time and burst the coils. The pumps used up their reserve pressure and stopped. The emergency systems operated for another hour, then they too went dead.

The first Turberites attacking here were armed with pikes and swords—side-arms of ancient fashion. Sabers; the cutlass; broad-swords; muskets, useless to fire, but used as bludgeons, or fitted with a bayonet; spears and lances of every type. Lurid cutthroats they were, slashing their way in a bloody torrent of hand-to-hand fighting.

Our police held them at occasional points of vantage. There were rooms in which the police intrenched themselves; there were cannons set up from which great balls of steel were hurled by compressed air and huge coiled springs.

But these Turberites fought with a recklessness that the police of this modern business era could not equal. They slashed and plunged and flung themselves to wage always a combat at close quarters.

A myriad hand-to-hand encounters. Needle blades and polished clubs of the city police. Lengths of steel wire with small metal balls at the ends; the police were expert at throwing them to lasso the legs of a running criminal. Small knives, tipped with harmless anesthetic, to be thrown like a dart. Or bombs of sleeping gas which in days of peace could be flung in a well ventilated street at an escaping criminal—but could not be used here.

Almost everywhere the city forces were worsted. But it took time. It was not an utter rout. A hundred thousand personal combats. Incon-

ceivable sanguinary warfare this! All indoors!

WHEN the local ventilating system was broken, Turber must have known it at once. Within an hour the type of fighting in this section was wholly changed. The Turberites had fought their way northward up Broadway with the city forces scattering east and west as they advanced. The attackers permeated every passage and tunnel and room. Thousands of them must have wandered aimlessly, lost. Wandering—killing and plundering as they went. The civilians were nearly all out of this area now.

A wedge of the Turberites reached what in my day was Columbus Circle. There seemed leaders among them to direct what they were after. They worked their way northward, and then shifted to the east—toward the corridor-street where our tower space was located.

The danger was recognized by the high command. Police troops were withdrawn from the Hoboken section, where similar scenes were transpiring south of the main city power station, and troops were brought from other sections. Our lines on the roof over the harbor were weakened—but there seemed little activity up there.

The strengthened police squads fought their way into mid-Broadway. The upflung wedge of Turberites was cut off. Inhuman with their heedlessness, their reckless thirst for blood; but here for the first time we saw them falter. Cut off from possible retreat, a panic swept them. A thousand or more of them tried to get back. The city troops drove them out of the Broadway corridor and hunted them down as they tried to escape into the honeycomb of the

city. We gained ground here for a time. But new mobs of the enemy came pouring northward.

All this within an hour or two. The ventilating system of Mid-Manhattan was failing. Turber knew it—and presently the whole character of the fighting there changed. The Turber mobs began withdrawing from this newly captured area. The air was turning fetid, but the police pursued the retreating Turberites as best they could.

THE Manhattan exits of the vehicular tunnels under the harbor network of islands were all held by Turber now. From them a new horde of his fighters began pouring. Strange figures in black hoods with goggling mouth tubes. They came prowling in the north-south corridors. They worked their way north. The fetid air did not seem to impede them. They held strange round objects in their hands. They threw the objects, which shattered and spread heavy-lying chlorine gas. And mustard gas.

The corridors and rooms choked up—with fumes and the fallen bodies of our police. The strange Turberite figures prowled like ghouls among them.

Strange familiar warfare! Alan and I recognized it. These grenade-like missiles—these gas bombs—these figures with gas masks—

The Great War of 1940-42 flashed to our memory.

The air throughout the levels of Park-Circle 90 was maintained fairly clear. The city troops made a stand there, in a great amphitheater of local tracks where many corridors converged. In my day it was called the Grand Central region.

The Turberites had stormed the eastern warehouse depots of what

was once Long Island City. Hordes of them began spreading west. It was part of this drive toward our tower space.

A message now came:

"Turberites making drive in Van Cortlandt tubes toward our main dynamos."

Had they got up that far? It seemed incredible. An attack in the subterranean northern city toward the main lighting plant! If successful it would plunge us into darkness. And these Turberites had obsolete flash lights from my own age, no doubt, with which our forces were not equipped.

I SAW upon the mirrors later a few scenes of this attack. The vast buried bowels of the city. The upright girders drilled and set deep into the rocks; the deep-set foundations of the pneumatic lifts; the gigantic sewerage system; the underground traffic tubes; the storage vats of chemicals. Narrow, gloomy tunnels of streets; vertical ladders; pneumatic tubes for freight transfer strung everywhere like capillaries in a section of flesh laid bare.

The Turberites came prowling; and finding the ventilation still working, brought hordes of their fellows.

I saw, in the subterranean city, in a dark open area of tracks on a viaduct beneath the Hudson River, where a hundred or two of the city troops were making a stand. In my day, this was about Dyckman Street.

The city forces had set up a battery of air-cannons on a metal terrace; the missiles rained down; but as though the terrace were some ancient rampart, the Turberites stormed it. Gas bombs were thrown by both sides, but the ventilation cleared the fumes away quickly. The terrace, with its northward underground cor-

ridor toward the light plant, was stormed and taken, after a siege of half an hour. A rain of missiles—nondescript chunks of metal thrown by hand; spears and javelins and darts—a cloud of poisoned arrows from a band of Indians posted at a distance; and arrows flaming with fire. Scaling ladders such as firemen of my day might have used came up from below and swarmed with men carrying dirks in their teeth as they climbed.

The terrace was finally carried. The Turberites ran northward to where at some other point the police were making a stand. Or climbed up the spirals into the city overhead. It was difficult to keep track of them. Groups appeared suddenly in many sections well within our safely held areas. They had to be hunted down and killed.

Of what use to mention my own and Alan's futile parts? There was a time, near the evening of this second day, when for hours I stood only a few hundred feet south of our tower space—stood at one of the top levels, where I had been told to guard an isolated transverse corridor. Occasional Turberites, lost from their fellows, wandered through. My part to stand in ambush and dispatch them with a rapier, as they appeared. Gruesome business! Like a sharpshooter of our Civil War posted in the bushes.

Or again, for a time I fed round steel bullets to an air-cannon where a battery of ours was intrenched on a bridge. A horde of savages with flying arrows and tomahawks assaulted us there, from the network of overhead tracks along which they had climbed.

There were times when Alan was sent off on other duties, and I watched at our tower space and

prayed for the tower to come. One time Alan was so long gone that I feared he might not return; and then he joined me, bleeding, torn from combat.

I HAVE hardly mentioned the panics that swept the civilian population which was caught in the city. The panics were worst the first day. Millions everywhere trying to get away into the north rural sections. The panics killed far more, that day, than did the fighting. For a time the authorities tried to cope with them. The traffic squads were on duty. The moving sidewalks, elevators—escalators—the trams and monorails—were moving. But it was soon all paralyzed. Most of the main vehicular arteries were soon in a tangle. Abandoned cars. Accidents everywhere.

A wandering, milling jam of people, mad with panic, their screams rang throughout all the rooms and every smallest corridor of the monstrous beehive—a pandemonium of horror. Soon there were dead everywhere. Millions died—but millions got away. Millions wandering on in a frenzy until they got northward to the open air.

A million must have walked through the tubes. They were always flooded with people; the East and West Side bridges were black with fighting mobs. A million climbed on foot up the Hoboken terrace area and wandered in the city sections there. And other millions fought their way to the north roof and embarked on the departing air liners.

The business of the city had ceased within an hour that first morning when the battle began. Inconceivable industrial details all were abruptly at a standstill. Food gave

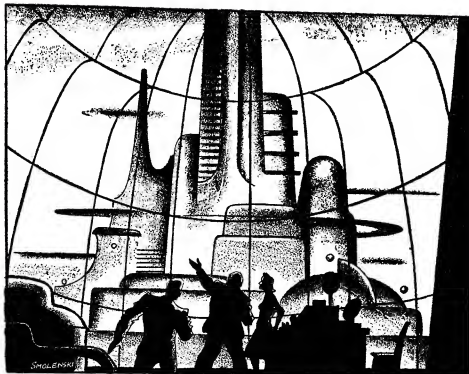
out. The Turberites captured many of the city's food depots. The incoming freight liners found no one to receive them. No further orders were issued. They soon stopped coming.

Gigantic business ramifications of Great New York. When they ceased, within a day disorganization spread over the world like waves in a pond. Confusion of industry everywhere. Everything to its smallest detail was interwoven with Great New York. The world was in confusion. The gigantic world-business machine of perfection was well oiled in its every smooth-running part; but the paralyzation of Great New York threw it all into disorder.

The world governments watched with amazement this sudden tragedy. Food was brought by liners from Great London. There was one arriving at the Tappan Terminal nearly every hour. Food, and fighting men, and such weapons as this era provided.

I SAW the mirrored scene as the sleek silver body of one of these liners came in sight over the Long Island coast. The air over the city roof had been occasionally invaded by marauding Turber ships. They had dropped missiles, but with little damage. But they had frightened off the food freighters and greatly impeded the local passenger ships which—the first and second days of the battle—stood bravely trying to transport the fleeing millions.

The transatlantic liner came like a giant silver flying-fish with glistening outspread wings. Alan and I watched it on the mirror as its image grew. This was at sunset of the battle's second day. The sky in the mirrored scene was red and gold. Great



Turber indicated high points of the vast future-city.

fleecy clouds lined with the vivid colors, with a background of deepening purple. I had almost forgotten that there was a sky! The liner came speeding. But from the south a Turber ship loomed up—a narrow thing of black, a ship, fleet and darkly piratical of aspect. Like a wasp it came. Catapulted missiles preceded it, but they fell upon the transport liner comparatively harmlessly.

The Turber ship circled, but the transport came steadily on. We could see its decks thronged with troops. It had been hastily armed in Great London. Its cannon answered the Turber fire. But presently it came over the city roof, and ceased its fire that the balls might not fall and do damage. It slowed into a great lazy circle, preparing to land on the Tapan stage.

THE Turber pirate ship followed it. We gasped. The Turber ship plunged for the liner; it kept on coming. They collided! Alan exclaimed: "Look at this other mirror!"

A telescopic image of the scene, greatly magnified, showed on another mirror. We saw the decks of the Turber ship. No one there! Its control room held mechanisms only! There was no living soul on this Turber ship!

A vessel, like the crude steering devices of our own time, aerially controlled! Within some instrument room in the Turber section of the city this helmsman sat. We had no such ships. There was no need for such mechanism in this age. It had been lost and forgotten now with the passing centuries. But Turber had located it and brought it here—

adapted it to this world-power with which the ether was flooded and which all ships used.

We saw the collision. The great white liner turned over. The two ships, locked together with broken girders, wavered and fell. We turned away as the mirrors showed us close views of the strewn human forms on the roof-top.

That was the first of the Turber suicide ships. He had others. One more was used when the next liner appeared. After that Great London ordered the others back. We were cut off from the world.

That night of June 13, when the battle had been raging some thirty-eight hours, found Alan and me quartered for needed sleep in a building of northern Westchester. Exhausted beyond all ability to talk or even to think, we slept.

Late in the evening we awoke. The tower still had not come. The battle raged everywhere with undiminished fury. The Turberites now had more than doubled their original area. The Hoboken power-house still held out; but in all the rest of the Jersey section the enemy was in full possession. Our forces at the power-house were surrounded; they could not hold it much longer.

The harbor islands were all Turber now. And the Brooklyn and Queens sections. Lower Manhattan, without local lights, with its ventilation gone, was a tomb of black corridors and rooms strewn with the dead, while Turberites with gas masks and flash lights prowled among them.

Broadway and all to its west toward the Hudson River was taken, up nearly to the Van Cortlandt region. But we still held the mid-section, which once had been Central Park; and Harlem, with widening

lines into the Bronx. Still held the vital space of the tower.

But it could not be held much longer!

CHAPTER XX

ON THE CITY ROOF

ALAN and I sat, that late evening of the battle's second day, upon our bed where we had just been sleeping. The news tapes and mirrors gave us the details of what had happened while we slept. Turber was winning. There could be no doubt of that.

The sleep had refreshed us; and suddenly, as I met Alan's eyes, I realized that his thoughts were the same as mine. There must be something we could do to try and rescue Nanette. We were no longer total strangers here.

We knew the city now; and by personal contact, or by reputation, we were known to most of the commanders of the city forces.

"That fellow Van Dyne," said Alan, "the Marshal of the West Manhattan area, likes us. I was thinking—"

I interrupted: "Get him to organize a small squad. It could be done without general orders. Make a secret raid into the Turber section—try to get to the aero—"

Make a desperate play; no matter how desperate! We were all desperate. The situation was almost as bad as it could be.

Alan shook his head. "I think the more men we took, the less chance of success. There's no chance, Ed, to fight our way into the Turber city. We'll have to try to get there by our wits—just you and I. I was thinking—"

He had a plan. We discussed it;

elaborated it. We called on the audiophone here by our bed for Van Dyne. He was available. Luck was with us. He was where we wanted him to be, on the roof, on patrol duty.

The least of the fighting so far had been on the city roof. The Turberites had made sorties, but often had abandoned the region they took. Van Dyne told us now:

The Hoboken roof section was mainly in Turber hands. And Brooklyn. But this central Manhattan section and all north of it we held.

Van Dyne was on the roof, over mid-lower-Manhattan.

"We want to come up and see you," said Alan.

"Where are you?"

Alan told him our location in northern Westchester. "Can you order us transportation?"

"Yes," he said. "But it's roundabout. Only a few official lines running."

"I know," said Alan. "Order us a guide to get us up to you. Hurry it, please."

A guide appeared in our room in a moment. He led us out to a small rail-car. It whirled us south. Then by lift to the roof. An official transport car on a narrow-gauge roof-track was operating with emergency battery. It took us south, over the roof-top.

THE roof spread like a great rolling expanse of rumpled canvas. Dark everywhere, with a few dotted lights. It never was level for very far. It rose in terraces, up and down, heaped up in peaks to cover huge, looming structures beneath. A roof, built haphazard, piecemeal, through many centuries. It rose to the right, over Hoboken, and ahead of us, over mid-Manhattan, it loomed in great terraced steps.

The open sky was over us. It seemed so strange to be out in the open air! A black night, with heavy, sullen clouds.

The roof surface was a dark metal labyrinth. Narrow metal roadways crossing it: viaducts, sometimes on stilts to strike a more level path; inclines up the terraces; footpaths and ladders. The air landing stages—all now abandoned—were up here.

There were low metal towers at intervals; observation and instrument towers; occasional low metal buildings—the meteorological station; observatories; metal posts were set at points of vantage holding the image finders for the city mirrors; and there were occasional official kiosks covering the entrances downward to the city. And an intricate system of drainage sluiceways, with heat projectors to melt the winter snows.

A maze of metal structure, this roof-top. It was all official—the public always was barred up here. Its activity was paralyzed now. The buildings were abandoned. The lights were nearly all out. It lay dark and mysterious, with only the glow of the city showing in occasional irregular patches where the roof structure was translucent.

OUR car was frequently challenged as we passed prowling patrols of the city police. Then we came to Van Dyne.

A friendly fellow. Alan, in confidence told him our plan, and he passed us. His post here was the end of our territory. Beyond it the roof was abandoned—a sort of No Man's Land, where figures prowled; but for hours now there had been no fighting.

"Good luck," Van Dyne said.

We slipped past and ran south. We followed a narrow viaduct which bent

to the right to avoid the higher terraces. The roof surface was some six feet beneath it, with occasional steps leading down. It was all solid black.

We were armed with the needlelike swords; and each of us carried a small dagger. It had been our original plan to have Van Dyne secure for us two uniforms of the Turberites. There were many bodies in the city in our territory.

But it was not necessary, Van Dyne told us promptly. The roof up here had been the scene of many bloody skirmishes. We could pick for ourselves.

We went south perhaps a mile. Alert, but we encountered nothing alive. Occasionally upon the roof we saw a heap of dead. Our little viaduct in one place was blocked with bodies. Turber's rabble was always garbed in the costumes of its native Time-worlds. It seemed a conceit of his. We lifted the dead bodies here. Grisly business! We selected two of about our size. They wore the red-coated uniforms of the British army of the Revolutionary War. In the darkness on the trestle-like viaduct we changed clothes. And then we found two dark cloaks. Threw them over our heads. In the darkness we might thus pass unnoticed. But if challenged we hoped we might be thought Turberites. Our native language—with uniforms like this—would be English, which is why we selected them. We discarded our police needle-swords and carried only the daggers.

Again we started south. The roof was at a low altitude here over the Hudson River section. We passed down to where the fence of the original Turberite area ranged in an irregular line east and west across the roof.

"Think we can get through it, Ed?"

"Van Dyne said the gates were more or less abandoned—some were smashed by the fighting up here."

"Yes. But we'll be challenged."

We had expected constantly to be challenged. The metal fence loomed close before us. It seemed thirty or forty feet high. There was a gateway near by.

"Over there," whispered Alan.

We were down on the roof-structure itself now, clambering forward over its sluiceways.

"Ed!" He gripped me. In the air over us the Turber Time-aero came sailing! It was solid—not traveling in Time—merely sailing here in Space. Two or three hundred feet above us, moving slowly north!

We stared with sinking hearts. This was so wholly unexpected. The aero seemed descending, as though it might land on the roof. A moment; and then it flashed, faded into phantom. There was an instant when I thought it had gone through the roof. The wraith of it vanished.

We stood stricken. Was Turber taking Nanette into some other Time-world? Abandoning his enterprise here? It did not seem likely when he was winning.

Or was the aero going into Time to try to find our tower? Had Turber some inkling that Lea was bringing us a superweapon? Was he sending his aero to try and prevent that? If so, were he and Nanette in the aero? We had no way of knowing.

"I think we should go on," Alan whispered at last. "Nanette may be in the city. If they'll accept us as Turberites—if we can only get to her—"

We got through the gateway. A guard was there. He chanced to speak English. We flung back our cloaks.

"Special business for Dr. Turber. Good news!"

There seemed only one fellow here. Then off to one side we saw a dozen or more, seated on the roof in a glow of light, lolling about, smoking.

The fellow passed us. We went on.

THE Turber roof was dim with dotted lights. But it was all in operation. Groups of soldiers at intervals; occasionally a transport car passing along on its narrow rails.

The fellow at the gate had waved vaguely toward this viaduct we now were traversing. We had followed his gesture. Our idea was to locate some Turber official whom we might fool—or force—into giving us information about Nanette.

A low metal building showed ahead of us. It was small; it seemed perhaps of only one room. An isolated, dark spread of roof was around it. This viaduct we were on led to it. The little house had open windows, low to the floor, and there was a glow of light within.

I whispered: "Some official may be on duty there. If we can rush him—make him tell us—"

A kiosk leading down into the city showed a hundred feet or so beyond the little building.

We left the viaduct. We crept forward over the dark open roof. We came to one of the open windows of the building. There must have been at that instant a dark figure lurking near us on the roof. Watching us. But we did not see it.

The window stood with its sill at our knees. We dropped low, peered in.

A single metal room with a glow of light. A metal table-block held a strange instrument of tubes and coils. Strange to me; but not to Alan. It

was a Time-vision instrument! Its screen stood facing us; upon it was an image of our tower, a phantom speeding tower!

A man sat with his back to us, hunched over the instrument. It was Turber! He was alone in the room. Alan's lips went to my ear:

"I'll go first."

The Time-vision was humming. It covered the slight noise we made. We got through the window; stalked noiselessly.

With a leap we seized Turber. He seemed unarmed, he did not struggle or cry out. He was startled; but he sat back with almost instantly recovered poise.

"Well! You here?"

We stood over him. Alan gripped him. There was a moment when I thought that Alan might plunge the dagger into him and have it over.

"Alan—easy!"

Alan shook him. He did not resist. Alan gritted: "God, I ought to kill you! Where is Nanette?"

"Nanette? Nanette?"

HE began to stall. It was too much for me.

I cuffed him in the face with the flat of my hand. He winced and went livid white; his eyes bored into me. But he held firm.

He said: "Why—Nanette? Take your hands off me, young fellow!"

Alan eased up. He motioned me off. "We want Nanette, understand? We're desperate, Turber. If you balk I'll stab you now and have done. Understand?"

He said: "Yes." He managed a wry smile. "If I raise my voice I can bring a dozen of my men here in a minute."

"But we'll kill you first," said Alan. He could not doubt it. He said:

"All right—then let's be quiet. I'm no more anxious to die than you are." His poise was coming back. He was gauging us; his glance seemed roving the room. "What do you want?"

"Nanette," I said. "Where is she? The truth, damn you!"

I felt he was going to say in the aero.

Instead he said: "Down in the city, not far from here."

There was a local audiphone hanging on a hook near him. Alan said: "Order her up. Be quick! Give the order and have one man only bring her up."

He moved his hand to take down the receiver. He stopped. He said: "You see, I've told you the truth. I could just as easily have said she was in my aero. Did you see my aero passing?"

"Yes," said Alan.

"I've sent it after your tower. With Bluntnose and Jonas." The Time-vision instrument was still operating; he gestured to the screen, which still showed our speeding phantom tower. The dials here were illegible to us. Turber added:

"Where has your tower been? I just picked up this image. Is your tower coming here?"

I REALIZED he was again stalling. I said: "You take down that receiver—"

He took it down. He said: "Shall I open the circuit?"

"Yes," commanded Alan. "And speak quietly—if you say a wrong word I'll run this dagger in your throat."

This clever scoundrel! We realized afterward that he had drawn our attention to the screen and thus had turned our backs to the door of the

room which he could see out of the tail of his eyes. As we bent alert while he reached for the audiphone a figure crept up behind us; launched full upon us.

We were taken wholly by surprise—knocked against the table. The woman Josefa! She had doubtless followed Turber to the roof, jealous of his every movement. He had seen her behind us in the doorway. She leaped upon us. Turber heaved upward. Alan's dagger grazed his arm.

Turber shouted. He struck with his fist at me and flung himself backward. The woman managed to cling to us both, heedless of our knives. She clung; kicked, bit and tore at us. It took a moment for us to shake her off. But in that moment Turber was near a window. He flung a heavy metal chair at us; and turned and leaped like a misshapen cat through the window. His shouts sounded outside, as he ran, giving the alarm.

We would be trapped here in another moment.

"Alan, come on! Get out of here!"

I was free of the woman. I tore her from Alan. She panted: "You let him alone! You let him alone!"

We turned and ran. Leaped into the darkness of the roof, where a turmoil of the alarm was beginning.

How we ever got back I do not know. Hunted, as two rats would have been hunted in that metal labyrinth by a pack of wolves. But we got through safely; found a broken section of the division fence. Ran northward.

The pursuit behind us presently died away. Then we came upon a city police patrol. They saw our red uniforms and very nearly killed us before we could speak. But we convinced them of our identity.

One said: "The tower came!"

It galvanized us. "The tower?"

"Came, but did not stop. Just a phantom."

What could that mean? Lea and San, passing, but not stopping!

We got transportation down into the city, avoiding the areas where the fighting was raging. An official car took us by devious route to the tower space. The street here was heavily guarded by the city forces, but the Turberites were fighting close to the south. Only a few blocks away we could hear the sounds of the battle.

The tower had come and passed. Its marked space in the street was empty. Our guards surrounded it. We stood among them.

A phantom showed over our heads! A moving phantom of the Turber aero! It darted across the tower space and vanished.

Now we understood! San and Lea were trying to land. Bluntnose, with the aero, was endeavoring to prevent them. He had followed the tower through Time. Two speeding phantoms! The aero could wing its way directly through the tower without contact—when they were speeding phantoms! But not if they stopped.

The tower showed again. A brief wraith of it. Just an instant; but in that instant the aero also materialized, circling, darting. Then they both were gone.

Would San dare stop? Would he risk that Bluntnose might wreck the aero and kill himself, just to wreck the tower?

Another moment. Again the phantoms showed. The aero was slightly above the tower, and to one side.

The tower did not pass. In a breath it materialized into solidity before us. My heart seemed to stop. San had dared!

The aero seemed half to turn. And then the wraith of it vanished!

Bluntnose had not dared risk it.

From the tower came Lea and San, dragging apparatus. The projector! They had been successful.

The guards in the street were shouting triumphantly. A turmoil was around us. I stood at the foot of the tower steps; I saw Lea fling herself impulsively into Alan's waiting arms.

The tower, with San, sped safely away.

But my heart was cold. Whatever the outcome here a fairyland of happiness for me was gone—the lost what-might-have-been for Nanette, and me.

CHAPTER XXI

THE EYE OF DOOM

“WHY, Ed! With this thing we can rock the city—bring death—”

“Death! Yes. But, Alan—”

“Death to them all! To Turber! If we can catch his aero before he can get to it we can kill them all!”

“But, Alan!” I was trying to say. “What about Nanette?”

He echoed: “Nanette?” Here was a tangible death for her in this weapon Lea had brought. Death for Nanette as well as destruction of the Turberites which was being planned here now. We would see it; we, indeed, might very well be chosen to accomplish it. And we stared wordlessly at each other and knew that it was inevitable.

It was about 1 A. M. of the night of June 13-14, 2445 A. D. Momentous night of history! Culmination of the Battle of Great New York! We sat, Alan and I, in a corner of one

of the rooms of the Hudson Machine Shops, watching Lea with the corps of engineers who had been summoned to assemble her weapon.

These electronic experts recognized it; not in its working form, but in its principle. An electronic beam, with the harmless aspect of a spreading searchlight ray. Like most scientific devices of importance, its practical working mechanism was complicated, with a basic scientific principle of the utmost simplicity. It carried—this harmless-looking beam of light—vibrations both etheric and atmospheric. They were communicable—as are all vibrations.

Harmless of aspect, this bronzed projector! I would have said, with a casual glance, that it was a searchlight of my own time. I have seen many like it. But it had a focussing grid of wires across its face instead of a lens. Wires of a metal no one could name. A focussing and firing mechanism; and insulated wires leading to a cylindrical tank, long as a man—the battery, in which was stored some unnamable electronic force.

Alan and I examined the apparatus as Lea showed how it should be assembled. Within the projector was an elaborate mechanism of tiny disks and thin metallic tongues, which in operation would whirl and vibrate. There were condensing coils; and bulbs of vacuum with laceworks of filament—lights to cast the beam. I saw that the light would pass through an intricate magnifying system of prisms—condensed finally to a focal point where a whirling mirror-disk cast it loose through the projecting grid of wires.

TREMENDOUS latent energy in this harmless-looking white light! A cold light—with a latent power dia-

bolic. Falling upon a distant object—touching anything of material substance—the energy of its vibrations was loosed.

"If that touches a building," Alan exclaimed, "this building, for instance—why, these walls in a moment would be trembling—quivering, shaking until presently they would fall—"

The principle was known even in my own age. This cold, white light, with its inconceivably rapid vibrations, would in a moment set up similar vibrations in anything it rested upon! Nothing of material substance could for more than a moment hold its form under the lash of such inconceivable trembling! With this beam we could rock the city—smash through its roof—bring death to every living thing upon which we could get the light!

The whole apparatus was carefully insulated. It would not operate here because of the world aerial power. The insulation was to protect it now.

It could not be operated with this insulation if we removed it, our power would instantly destroy the filaments and coils, and in a moment or two detonate the battery. The world power would have to be shut off during its operation.

There had been a consultation of the world governments fifteen minutes ago when in code our city government had asked that the world power be discontinued. We now had the decision. At the Trinitight Hour—three hours after Midnight this night—the huge Scotland plant would go dead for sixty minutes. No more time than that could be given us. Most of the air liners—and all the civic lighting and ventilating and traffic systems—had emergency batteries for sixty minutes. Beyond that limit the whole world would go into disaster.

Sixty minutes, beginning two hours from now! It gave plenty of time to assemble the apparatus and mount it in a swift ship. Lea was to be beside the man who would be chosen to control the projector.

NOW Alan and I sat whispering, for upon us had come the realization that this would mean Nanette's death.

I said: "But Nanette—this is death for Nanette!"

"Edward!"

An audible answer! A microscopic aerial voice here in the workshop room-corner! Alan heard it also. And it came again:

"Edward!"

Hushed accents! Imperative! Vehement! Nanette's voice!

"Edward, don't move! Don't look surprised! I know you're there—you and Alan—I've heard you talking."

Tiny voice, materializing from the air! Alan murmured something, but I gripped him. We sat tense.

It came again.

"Don't show surprise! It may be that they have an image of you at some other receiver! I'm alone here now—just for this moment."

I said softly: "Shall I speak? This is Ed—can you hear me?"

"Yes, Edward. They've been listening—Jonas was in here, at an aerial, eavesdropping on you. They've lifted their barrage for this one finder. Located you—they've been listening to the men there with you—Lea's weapon."

Aerial eavesdropping! Turber was aware of our plans!

Nanette's voice added:

"Turber is off somewhere, but Jonas thinks he can locate him. I wanted you to know it. I think Turber may take us in the aero and go."

I exclaimed: "Yes, Nanette! Go!"

Alan tried to speak, but I silenced him. This at least was mine! These few last minutes—Nanette's and mine!

"Go, Nanette!"

"Jonas wants us to go now, to escape without Turber! But he does not know how to operate the aero. The Indian does—Bluntnose the Indian—but he won't go now—he wants to wait for Turber. Edward, I must talk quickly—I heard what you and Alan were saying. About me—death—but I know that, of course.

"Tell Lea I said good-by. I can hear Jonas coming back now! You must have your men stop talking there—or whisper very carefully! And—can Alan hear me? Good-by, Alan, dear."

He gulped: "Oh, Nanette, little sister—"

"And—good-by. Edward—"

I stammered: "Good-by." I choked over it.

"Good-by — Edward, I — always loved you—very much—ah, so much! And I want you to know it."

I thought: "Dear God!" I stammered: "Nanette, darling—I've always loved you—"

"He's here! Don't speak!"

I gasped hurriedly: "Get away in the aero, Nanette!"

"Edward! No more! Good-by, dear."

We waited, but there was only silence.

CHAPTER XXII

SIXTY MINUTES

"ALAN, will you be all right? Can you do it?"
"Yes, I must." He set his jaw grimly. "I must."

I touched his hand, where it rested

on the projector; his fingers were cold, but steady.

This forward gondola-cabin, hanging almost under the nose of the swift, small ship, was silent, with only a low thrum audible from the rear motors.

From where we sat, with Lea beside us at the projector, the wide transparent windows gave us an unobstructed view forward and down. We were rising now from the Hudson air-stage—a brief flight, and we would be over the city roof. Sixty minutes! The world-power was off now; in sixty minutes it would flash on again and our weapon would be useless. Sixty minutes! A very little time! Yet, it can be an eternity.

The officials at the Hudson shops had said to Alan and me: "You know this girl—and she knows the weapon—its operation. The Council ordered that one of you operate it, with the girl beside you."

I looked at Alan. My heart was pounding. I wanted Alan to speak, and he did not. It seemed that he never would. Then he said: "I'm older—I'll do it, if—if they think I should."

No executioner at his switch in the little room behind an electric chair of our day could ever have shuddered as Alan now must be shuddering. But he held himself firm when once we were in the ship's cabin. The controls, with a white-faced young pilot seated at them, were near us. There were several other men in the cabin, with observation instruments; and at a bank of mirrors, receivers and audiphones three operators held us in close communication with the city authorities. Our commander moved quietly about; seldom speaking; but intent upon every detail.

Sixty minutes! Five of them were

already gone when—with the world-power dead at the Trinight Hour—we hastily stripped our mechanism of its insulation and rose from the landing-stage. The gigantic city loomed into the sky before us. The night was still overcast.

We climbed steeply, then levelled, and presently we were over the city roof; a thousand feet over it perhaps; and beneath us it spread in the darkness like a great rolling expanse of soiled canvas.

We had not heard Nanette's voice again. Precautions were taken against the eavesdropping. What Turber personally may have learned of our plans we never knew. Nothing probably, until near the end. He had no warning that the world-power was to be shut off. The battle everywhere in the city was undiminished in its fury. It was raging down there now. Our mirrors, here in the cabin, occasionally shadowed it, but there was no other sign.

TURBER had carried our tower Space. San was gone with the tower—with orders from Lea to swing slowly past at intervals. The Turberites, finding the tower was gone, left a guard there and swept on—fighting our troops northward. The Hoboken power-house still was surrounded, but holding out. The attack there seemed momentarily to have slackened as Turber concentrated on his northern drive.

There was still no fighting on the roof. Our lines had withdrawn northward as the Turber mobs swept north through the city. Most of this roof area seemed deserted. We could make out occasionally the dark forms of the Turberites patrolling this captured area. We crossed over the Turber wall. The roof from this

height was very little different of aspect.

Our projector had not yet flashed. All our lights were carefully hooded. But we thought that by now some Turber ship would have come up to assail us. There had been occasional Turber patrol ships here all day, but none were here now.

I thought that the harbor with its lacework of causeways and islands must be beneath this area of the roof. It was difficult for me to estimate. Far off, ahead to the right where the roof ended beyond Staten Island, I could see the banks of lights that marked the great Turber wall inclosing this end of his rural territory. There was no ship in sight.

I murmured: "When do we turn it on, Alan?"

"Soon. When we get near where Turber houses the aero."

"Yes, but where is that? I don't know where we are."

We had no idea where the aero was either; but our orders were to attack its usual housing place.

The pilot heard me. He said: "Approximately approaching Staten. We have little information of the Turber city. But his aero is kept some two or three miles farther ahead."

Our beam had an effective range of about fifteen hundred feet. From this present altitude we would have to direct it almost vertically downward.

LEA murmured something. We followed her gesture ahead through the observation pane into the darkness of the sky. Our pilot saw it at the same instant—a black shape looming—a Turber patrol ship rushing at us! With all my air experience, my senses reeled as we dropped. I

gripped my bench. We made a forward loop—nose down.

I heard the rush of air as the Turber ship almost brushed us. We righted. The pilot muttered an oath. Somebody said: "Where did it go?" There was a flurry in the cabin.

We could see nothing in the darkness. We flew onward. Then we made out the Turber ship, not following us, but flying north. As I turned to gaze behind us, to the north on the roof top fighting was beginning. Torchlight gleamed—waving, moving lights there.

We caught some close details on our mirrors. Our troops had come up and were assailing the Turber patrol lines. The Turberites were falling back; but beneath us, in a moment, lines of re-enforcements appeared. There were tracks here on the Turber-owned roof. We saw spots of illumination where cars were loading with fighters to be rushed north. Our image-finders showed the Turber ship. It had been rushing north—like ourselves, without lights—to meet this roof attack. A rain of missiles dropped from it.

Our commander said suddenly:

"Now, Tremont! Start here—ten degrees off the vertical, to the left about another ten. Hold the course as you have it, Pierson."

Our orders to flash the beam! Alan and I set the range-dials. Lea with nimble fingers made the last adjustments, wound the firing tensions, and then crouched on the floor by the battery to handle the gauges of its current-flow.

The projector-face swung downward through an opened aperture in the window-shield. I focused it at the agreed-upon spreading of the beam. From our instrument table some one sang out: "Eleven hun-

dred feet altitude here, Williams. Roof ahead averages nine to eleven hundred under us—"

I made the adjustments; the beam would strike with a circle of light about a hundred feet in diameter.

Alan's voice: "All ready, Ed?"

"Yes!"

He added: "Lea?"

In the dimness of our cabin interior I saw her white arm go up in answer from where she crouched. She said: "Yes—ready."

Alan snapped on the current.

I sat back; I was limp and cold all over. There was nothing for me to do. Nothing but watch—and listen.

The light-beam grew very slowly into being. A low whirring—a trembling; it purred, this diabolic thing, like a smug cat licking its lips. Purred, and then seemed to hiss as its anger grew. Whirring, tiny vibrations of sound; they went up the scale in pitch; always soft—higher until the thing was screaming with its microscopic voice. Higher, faster until it faded away, too rapid for audibility.

But the low hiss and sputter of the current remained. And the light-beam grew. Darkness at first; then a radiance of faint dull red, streaming down from our projector; red and then up through the spectrum to violet; then white. Cold white—nothing but the mingling of all colors made too rapid for separate visibility.

A minute of this process. Our ship was hovering—horizontal propellers holding us poised. Some one said:

"His vehicle ought to be about here."

Beneath us now was the same Space which in my Time held the Turber Sanatorium! I gazed down our white, slightly spreading beam. It fell on the roof here with a hundred foot circle of white illumina-

tion. It showed a small metal house on the roof-surface, with a group of Turberites on guard along a railed trestleway near it. They had evidently been lounging about; they were on their feet now, surprised by the light.

I stared, cold with fascination. I heard Alan murmur: "God!"

THE men stood with upflung hands against the dazzling light. Stood transfixed—and then tried to run. I saw one fall; another turn, waver and crumple. Others, stronger, tried to stagger—weirdly swaying with arms flinging wildly and legs bending, crumpling—they did not lie mercifully still at once, but writhed gruesomely.

The figures were strewn in a moment. Some, near the edge of the circle, got out of it and away. Confusion—horror down there. Other figures came like frightened animals running into the light; stood stricken and fell—or managed to get back.

Lea appeared beside me. She bent over Alan—showed him other adjustments. The circle of light narrowed upon the small house.

I had been aware of a sound from below.

A throbbing—a rhythmic throb. The house and all this immediate section of the roof was vibrating—trembling—shaking—

It grew louder. Like a pendulum, where at the end of each swing your finger gives it an added push, the impulse of our beam was shaking this little building—rocking this roof-segment.

A corner of the building split off and fell; a crack seemed to open in the roof; the little house broke apart and slithered through the crack. The human figures spilled down.

A jagged hole was here. The light

bored down into it. A ragged broken cross-section of the great city-structure. Our glimpse went down through rending, clattering walls, falling ceilings, collapsing floors and tiers. Human figures engulfed. A turmoil, a chaos of sound and movement.

The destruction seemed to spread inward. One tier brought down another. A widening jagged wound was here in the metallic city. It extended a hundred or two hundred feet down from the roof level. But our range from this altitude could go no deeper. Was the aero down there in some fortified room underneath this tangled wreckage? Nanette, down there perhaps, still alive—

"Move us along, Pierson. Tremont, spread the beam! We'll go down to five hundred feet."

The roof broke in larger fragments as the light widened and intensified with our descent. This whole section of the city must have been quivering now; we could hear its ragged pulse, mingled with the rending of metal, the crash and crack of trembling, collapsing interior walls.

With the first breaking of the roof insulation-barrage, our mirrors began picking up interior images. I did not see them—I sat at the projector with Alan, watching the widening break in the roof as our beam bore down from this lower altitude. But I heard the comments of the men behind me in the cabin. The panic of defeat was spreading throughout the Turberite-owned city. Mobs of Turberites, soon in a wild rush to come this way; against all reason, rushing in a panic of terror toward this quaking, falling area! Because the Time-aero was near here!

WE REALIZED it. But no Turber mob ever reached the ve-

hicle. We found later that it was fortified with metallic barriers. They shut off the mob which tried for safety—barred those few who got past or around the falling area.

The panic spread up north to the battle lines. The tide of the fighting abruptly turned. The Turberite wolves, suddenly stricken with rumors of defeat, began trying to withdraw. Our troops pursued them. Soon it was a rout. I heard no orders—no talk of the taking of prisoners. Like wolves trying to run, the Turberites were hunted down.

Lea plucked at me. I turned again to look back toward Manhattan. There were torches everywhere on the roof to the north—our police troops, suddenly heartened, were surging up triumphant and sweeping the enemy back. In the glare of the lights the black Turber ship up there showed as it winged away. Escaping—and in a moment one of our ships rose up and took after it.

Some one said: "Look! The Turber Jersey landing stage!"

Far ahead, where the city ended beyond the Staten Island section, a group of Turber ships came up. Coming to attack us! The thought flashed to me. But it was not so. Turber ships—escaping. They sped off to the south, over the Turberite rural district.

I prayed that one of them might be carrying Nanette.

SOMEONE said: "Forty minutes; twenty left!"

Had this all been only forty minutes?

"Pierson! Lower! There it is!"

We dropped nearly down to the roof level. The roof structure was gone now over a segment of fully a mile. The beam, with Alan oscillating it, bathed the whole shattered

area in white light. Indescribable scene of ruin! A vast honeycomb of metal city, shaken into ruins as though by some persistent earthquake; girders of metal piled in a tangled mass like jackstraws. Stone and mortar; plaster; wood—all the innumerable shattered substances strewn in a wreck inconceivable. Fires were starting in a dozen places; lurid glare of red-yellow flames; black smoke rolling up.

And sounds inconceivable—a torrent of crashes—explosions—and, I think, an undertone built with the myriad screams of the dead and dying.

As we descended almost to the level of the hole where a huge slice of the roof was dangling, our light struck into an open area of the city. There was less wreckage here; we could see down to the ground level. It was not very far down—a rise of ground was here; a hill—and it seemed an open parklike space of metal pavement surrounded by high metallic barriers.

They crumbled, these barriers, within a moment as the white beam caught them. There had been a low roof over the park, but it was fallen.

The aero stood exposed, but still unharmed. It rested motionless on the pavement. Our beam touched it. Horror surged at me. I gasped: "Alan—" He swung the beam away. What he said I do not know. But he had seen it—as I saw it; the white light always showed everything with intense clear detail; the figure of Nanette standing in the aero doorway! We could even see her now, dim but distinguishable — standing there—waving from the shock of the light as it had so briefly struck her.

"Alan—don't!" An anguished cry

that sounded like my voice; and our commander's voice: "On the vehicle, Tremont! God, don't let it get away!" The walls around the park were falling. There was a mingled glare of our beam and the yellow light of the burning ruins near by. It showed a man's figure appearing in the aero doorway; he jerked Nanette backward into the interior. He stood for a moment in the doorway; Bluntnose, the Indian! He flung up his arm like a signal. And other figures showed, running forward. Turber; and Josefa. Trapped somewhere in the city and just now arriving at the waiting Time-vehicle. Turber, with his knowledge of the city labyrinth just now able to get here. His figure, and the woman who clung to him, avoided our circle of light; Alan in his confused horror had swung it farther away.

Instant impressions. A second or two while we sat cold and stricken. Our commander's voice: "Tremont! Good God, man! Is that Turber?"

The commander bent over Alan and seized the projector. The light swung to Turber and the woman. They staggered, but kept on. Then the woman fell. She lay twitching. Turber left her. He stumbled, fell; but got up. Gruesomely contorted—staggering with twitching steps. Almost at the aero's entrance he fell again. Relief surged over me. The aero, bathed in the white and yellow glare, went thin as a ghost. An apparition—with the solid broken figure of Turber lying huddled. A wraith of the vehicle. It was gone!

But only for a moment! Why, what was this? The horror surged back to me. Unimaginable horror! The aero had gone. But had gone only a moment into our future, and then had stopped. And in that moment we had caught up with it.

As we stared at the empty space, with that passing moment the Time-aero materialized again. It lay in a tangled, disintegrating heap of metal with lurid green tongues of gas-flame licking at it!

CHAPTER XXIII

UNRECORDED HISTORY

TO ME, the rest of those sixty minutes were a vague, drab dream of things horrible to see. Awesome—but though the rocking, shattering Turber city went down while I watched, it all seemed dreamlike. My mind was on that torn heap of wreckage which had been Turber's Time-vehicle. Nanette's body lying somewhere there.

Alan seemed dazed. A man shoved him away and took his place. He sat huddled by Lea. I sat, numbly staring. Then someone said: "Two minutes! That's enough, Grantson! Get the girl and those ancients to insulate the projector. Hurry! We won't need it any more, but no use ruining it."

The world-power was about to come on again. We hastened to insulate our projecting mechanism. The light-beam died. But its work was through. All this end of the Turber-owned city was in ruins. The black waters of what had once been New York Bay were exposed. The islands and the causeways and all the structure there was strewn and tumbled and broken. All of what had been Staten Island was wrecked. Fires and explosions everywhere, and masses of lurid smoke mounting; and all the upper air pungent with the smell of chemicals.

The gas clouds hid the Staten Island hill, with its wrecked aero.

We swung back toward Manhattan as the world-power flashed on. Our sixty minutes were over.

Aftermath of the battle; I need not detail it. To Alan and me it was all unimportant. We kept Lea close with us. Gentle little creature! Why, I suppose her ethereal beauty could not be matched in all the world. But my mind went always to Nanette.

I recall how vaguely I gazed at the mirrors as they pictured the rout and final destruction of the Turberites. The hunt for the panic-stricken mobs ceased in a few hours; those still alive were allowed to escape. I recall sitting with triumphant city officials and hearing it all discussed. The Turberites would be banished to various other localities—scattered. I heard the triumph when searching parties in the ruins found the Turber Treasure Vaults. His tremendous wealth would go to enrich the city government; to rebuild the destroyed area.

Turber and all his leaders were dead. His Empire was broken; its menace met and conquered. There was official government praise and thanks for Lea, Alan and myself. Our interest in it all was apathetic. We had lost Nanette—we found that our greatest desire was to get away from this world which had taken her from us.

Alan and I did not go with the party of searchers who brought back the bodies from the wreckage around Turber's vehicle. Nanette was not found—but they told us there were many bodies not recognizable. We did not go to see them.

A day passed—then another—and on the third a message came which took Lea and Alan and me in shuddering, trembling haste to where now

workmen were cleaning away the wreckage of the shattered area.

Nanette!

Three workmen had seen it happen. They were working just now, close beside the mangled pile of metal which was Turber's vehicle. From the air a few feet above their heads—the empty air—a human form came hurtling. They saw it all in an instant materialize. A shadow—a ghost—but in a second, when it struck the ground almost at their feet, it was solid. A human form. A girl—lying broken and unconscious. But still alive!

We were taken to see her in the improvised morgue and hospital near the ruins. It was Nanette. We could see that. And we looked just once, and then they led us away.

She was still alive. Oh, I thanked God for this era of progress of 2445! Five hundred years ahead of my own lifetime these surgeons and physicians who for days were working over Nanette! They said she might live. Her broken body might be restored to a semblance of itself.

Our tower with San arrived. It waited, this time.

THEN, at last, they said that Nanette surely would live. They took us one day to see her. She lay so swathed in bandages that not much more than her eyes were visible. We spoke to her, just for a moment; bending low, we could hear her murmuring answers. Then Lea held her close and crooned to her, and she went back to sleep.

Another week. We saw her again; propped up for a moment in bed to receive us. The bandages were gone now from her face and head and shoulders. She sat, staring into the direction of our voices.

My poor Nanette! Her face, shriveled and scarred! She raised what seemed a twisted arm to welcome us. She tried to smile. A travesty—a mockery. I recalled her gentle beauty, her sweet womanly dignity—that little smile, so sweet, that she used to have.

I leaned over her. "Nanette, darling!"

"Edward, you came—I didn't want them to let you come—"

I said: "Lea is here. Do you recognize her voice?" I bent over her as though with a great secret. "Nanette, she and Alan love each other. We're just waiting for you to get well—it won't be so long now. Then we're going home."

"No," she murmured. "They say it won't be long now. And they say—"

"San is here with the tower. But he stays always in it. That's why he hasn't been to see you."

Oh, I had phrased it wrongly! She shuddered.

"Edward—that time, you remember—when I said good-by over the aerial? I—I thought that it was—really good-by. You understand?" She was stammering.

"I don't understand, Nanette."

"I mean—I—I told you that I loved you. That was very wrong of me. I do not—I do not love you. I n-never did."

She could not see the rush of moisture that clouded my eyes. I gulped, but I managed a laugh.

"You can't get out of it that way. Of course you love me! I'll make you!"

But she held me off. "No."

From across the room the watching nurse said: "She should be kept quiet, Mr. Williams."

I relaxed and sat back. "We'll for-

get it, Nanette—not talk about it now, because—”

“Yes, forget it. They say, these surgeons—”

“Nanette, listen—we’re rich! You didn’t know that. The city government here has awarded us—the four of us—and some for San—some of the Turber gold. In 1945, Nanette, what we four have will be accounted at nearly a million dollars.”

She was trying to speak, but I talked fast against it. “You’ve always wanted to live in the country, haven’t you? So does Lea. We’re going to buy—Alan and I are—two little homes—near each other, understand—out in the country somewhere in our world of 1945. Where there will be trees and flowers—and the beautiful sky over us.”

“Edward, I’d rather you went away. You understand? It’s wonderful of you—your plans and all that.”

“Nanette, you’re talking nonsense!”

“All right. Perhaps I am. They say my hair can be made to grow long again very quickly, Edward.” Her voice was trying to be jocular. “That will help, won’t it? And yesterday a surgeon was here from Great London. A specialist in plastic surgery—”

The nurse called: “Better go now, Mr. Williams. Not tire her.”

THERE were more days of waiting.

We had long since heard, through Nanette’s nurse, her brief account of those last moments in Turber’s aero. She had been for a time alone in the control room with Bluntnose and Jonas. They were waiting for Turber. Jonas had fallen into a panic of fear; he sat huddled and chattering, domi-

nated by the Indian who, with stolid indifference to the city tumbling around them, was waiting for the master.

Nanette had stood in the aero doorway. Her mind was groping with a plan. Bluntnose came and pulled her back. He stood in the doorway and shouted welcome to the arriving Turber and the woman Josefa.

Nanette knew that the control room was filled with a blinding glare of light reflected from our white beam so near at hand outside. She heard Jonas scream something about the glare; she could feel it—almost see it. And she could hear, outside the aero, a pandemonium of sound.

She knew every detail of the corridor and the control room. She ran past the huddled Jonas. In a moment Turber would enter, and the aero would flash away and escape. Nanette ran for the instrument table which held the controls. She knew it was close by a window; she knew that the window was open and that it was some six or eight feet above the ground.

Desperate plan! Just a chance to wreck the aero and still to save her own life. She had no knowledge of the controls’ operation. She leaped for the table. Her fingers tore at the delicate wires—her clenched little fists smashed the fragile vacuum globes.

She felt the aero sway crazily; she felt it flash as she flung her body through the window. She fell into the black emptiness of insensibility—

The aero had lurched a few seconds into the future, and with every law of Nature transgressed by its derelict flight it had stopped and crashed into ruins.

Nanette’s body, hurtling through the air, must have been just within

the aero's influence. Inconceivable shock to her! A fall through Space of a few feet. But the impulse from the lurching Time-vehicle had thrown her—as she fell those few feet—into the third day forward.

But it was over now. She lived; these surgeons with their science were giving her back to me.

We waited through those hours; the operation was successful. Her face was—restored.

AND so I find myself now with little more to record. We are back now in the world of 1945. We went with Lea while she took leave of her grandfather; and she left him to follow her destiny with Alan. But San would not come. He took us to our own Time-world and left us. He said, forever.

No one saw us as we slipped from the tower into Central Park that last time. A few days only since we had left. It was in the night; and no one was there to see the phantom tower as it came, paused solid for a moment, and then vanished.

Or if we were seen, what of it? No one would believe it; the newspapers would not bother to print it again.

The world here moves quietly along.

Not far from New York City—now in 1945, as I write—there are two little houses, twins upon a small farm. Alan Tremont and his wife live in one of them; and the other is Nanette's home and mine. No one around here is very interested in us. Nanette says that the neighbors sometimes speculate upon Mrs. Tremont's nationality. Some of the women have called her a Scandinavian; they say she looks like one—or talks like one, I forget which. But there is a Swedish woman in the village who is convinced that Lea Tremont is a fair-haired, blue-eyed native girl of the South Sea Islands. The Swedish woman has never been to the South Sea Islands, but she is convinced of it nevertheless.

Once—only last week—Nanette found Lea dancing in the shadowed moonlight of our apple orchard. Dancing for Alan. Her robe of blue fabric—her golden hair flying. Shadow girl! Her fairy figure weaving in and out of the shadows.

But you can't explain to the farmer's wife down the road that Mrs. Tremont is a shadow girl!

THE END

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by **PAUL DENNIS LAVOND**

(Author of "Something from Beyond," "A Prince of Pluto," etc.)

Illustrated by Conanight.

CHAPTER I

HEIRS OF SPACE FLIGHT

NICK HARTNETT stepped off the upper lip of the thousand-foot shaft and floated gently downwards. When he had fallen about half the distance, he reached out for a stanchion, grasped it easily and pulled himself gracefully into the lounge-room of the *Columbia*.

What he saw there was precisely what he expected to see. There was Dorothy Gilbert, curled in a spring-hammock, reading a book. Nick was looking over her shoulder before she knew he had entered.

"Bodie's 'Parecliptic Orbits,'" he read aloud. "Dorothy, don't you ever think of anything but your job?"

She looked up, smiling, brushing aside a lock of tousled hair that sought her eye. "Often, Nick. But where would we be if I didn't check my courses against those plotted by a competent authority?"

"Just about where we'll be if you do," he guessed, tugging at his ear with long, knobby fingers. "You're

my idea of a competent authority yourself."

"Thanks, Nick. How are the contracels holding out?"

"Wonderfully!" he grinned. "It seems as if my father did a fair job of inventing there—though maybe not quite good enough." He knelt and touched a button inset in the floor; instantly the metallic luster of it dulled and clouded, then the clouds seemed to vanish as the floor became transparent. In an instant it appeared to have vanished entirely, revealing an immense sweep of blackness interspersed with white-hot, tiny specks of light that were stars and planets.

Nick stared out at them. The whole field of stars was moving, it seemed, though, in actuality, it was the ship itself that spun on its axis, providing them with the illusion of gravity they required. It was hard for Hartnett to realize that this view was almost brand-new to human eyes, that only twenty or thirty people could ever have seen stars and the solar system from this vantage point, outside the plane of the ecliptic. There were seven persons in the *Columbia*

An Engrossing Tale of An Incredible World

now, and there had been eighteen or twenty in its predecessor which had been reported lost some years before. Those two ships, the only ones in the System's great armada to be equipped with the counter-acceleration devices that made it possible to venture out of the confines of the Solar System, were also the only ones to leave the plane of the ecliptic.

"Where's Earth?" Nick asked absently without looking up.

Dorothy closed the book on a finger and leaned over the edge of the hammock to look. "It's not in sight now," she said. "Wait until we spin a little farther. Of course, I can't guarantee you'll be able to see it then, either, because the ship may hide it. But we'll see. We're looking out one side of the ship and Earth is directly in back of us."

He snapped off the vision and the floor returned to normal. "As soon as we get the reports from the two goops," he mused, "we can start making definite plans for the outing."

"**WE** heard you," came a voice from just outside the lounge, and, a second later, Bob Vickers appeared, climbing hand-over-hand against the slight pull of the acceleration that managed to seep through the not-quite-perfect guard of the contraccels. He pulled himself into the lounge and turned back, extending a hand to Fred Marquis, who followed him in.

The two glared at Nick with injured expressions. "So this," stated Vickers sadly, "is how you refer to your loyal aides behind their backs." He turned to Marquis: "Colleague, we may as well tear up that paper and save ourselves further humiliation."

Dorothy Gilbert closed her book with a snap. "Far be it from me to

poke my pretty nose into your little brawls, but haven't you two been rather long in getting the data?"

Marquis made a sweeping bow. "Fair lady," he replied softly, "I appeal to your innate sense of justice and fair play. Did or did not our noble captain, on two occasions, call us all away from our gruelling labor to strain our ears trying to hear an alleged distress signal?"

Dorothy laughed gaily, shaking her hair away from her forehead. "Indeed, our noble captain did. Not only was your invaluable time wasted, but mine as well. I was rechecking the course and had to start from scratch after the interruption."

"My lady is as gracious as she is charming," bowed Vickers. He faced Nick. "We will be generous, sir, and accept your apology."

"The ship's company," sighed Nick, "is reminded that the original Hartnett expedition was not entirely lost. It is to be assumed that they are still trying to contact someone, us in particular. Thus the careful attention to what appeared to be distress signals."

"Now may I suggest that you save your precious time by letting me know what you found?"

"That," murmured Marquis to Vickers, "is as close to an apology as he'll ever get."

MARQUIS unrolled a small chart, holding it so both Dorothy and Nick could see. "This," he explained, "you can check at your leisure, though I'm a monkey's uncle if you find anything wrong with it. To sum it up briefly, the *Columbia* is not only the largest space-ship ever made but also the fastest and most powerful."

"Very nice," replied Nick, "but that alone isn't good enough. We can still be the fastest thing aspace and not be capable of a voyage to Alpha Cen-

tauri and back within the span of a lifetime."

"If this is correct," interrupted Dorothy, jabbing at an equation with her index finger, "then we can do it easily."

"It's too damn bad," mused Nick, "that my father was so secretive about things. Whatever it is we have here, I'll bet he had just as good—if not better—on the Orion ten years ago."

"Didn't he leave any notes?" asked Vickers.

"None. Apparently he feared their falling into the wrong hands in case anything happened to him. The only thing he did leave was wave n, the one he promised to use for communications. That's what the contracel formula came over."

Dorothy's nose wrinkled in puzzlement. "I was under the impression," she said, "that the contracel formula was radioed to Earth mysteriously—only it was badly garbled, just fractions coming through. And you, Nick, were the only one who could make anything out of it."

"Partly true," he admitted. "The 'mysterious' radio message however was something I cooked up to keep the newspapers satisfied. I wanted to let out the publicity that the Hartnett expedition wasn't completely done in, but I didn't want to draw attention to wave n. The fewer people who know it exists, the better. If I hadn't thrown them offtrack with a little hocus-pocus, the secret might be out."

Vickers blinked. "Excuse me," he put in—"in this case, I guess I am a goop. But can you explain the contracel to me? I never really got it."

"I'm no better off," grinned Nick. "I managed to get enough data from the radio so as to know how to throw

the thing together, but as to precisely what it does and why I can only guess...and I'd rather not get out on a limb on it.

"All I know is this: interstellar travel, to be anything at all, requires really tremendous speed. To get that speed you have to accelerate like hell. And human bodies aren't equipped to take the acceleration required.

"Well, what Dad did was to figure out a counter-acceleration device, which he called the 'contracel' for short. All I know is that it blankets the effects of really terrific acceleration so far as our feeling it goes."

"Have you any idea, Nick," asked Dorothy Gilbert, suddenly serious, "where the Hartnett party is?"

He shook his head. "They were outward bound for Alpha Centauri, just as we'll be after we get home and check these results. I've no idea how far they got, because I don't know how to check distances by wave n. In fact, I don't think it can be done; the damned thing doesn't travel right.

"You, Dorothy, and Bob, Edgar, and I are all members of the family of the original Hartnett expedition. The reason I wanted you three was because I really expect to look for Dad and his friends on our way to Alph. You, Fred, and Grenville and Timbie aren't exactly family members in our little circle, but you're next thing to it. We'll have to have a bigger crew for the outing, of course."

Dorothy ran her fingers through her hair. "It's been over twelve years since I last saw Harry," she whispered. "I wonder what he looks like now?"

JOE TIMBIE was sucking laboriously on a water-tube as they pulled themselves into the control

room. He laid it aside at their entrance, and wiped his face furiously.

"The interference is terrific," he began, "but I sounded the alarm because I'm definitely getting something every now and then, although it's hard to say what."

"Any idea as to the source?"

"You know how wave n is. Edgar's been cooped up in his cage for about seven hours now, and, if he survives, I damn well think he'll have taken wave n to pieces and put it together again. Then we'll know how to trace the signals."

Dorothy Gilbert sat on a bench swinging her legs thoughtfully. "How's the intensity, Joe?"

Timbie clutched his hair. "O gawd!" he groaned. "It just shouldn't happen to a dog. This wave has the most unholy variations ever conceived by Lucifer. You remember how it was on Earth?"

"Yeah," agreed Nick. "Pretty wavy to say the least."

"Well it's all of that here—only the little jigger has got itself another twist. Not only does the intensity vary according to no laws whatsoever, but every now and then, she comes through full blast, sans interference, backwards."

"What!" There was a chorus on that.

"You heard rightly. I used to have a hobby back on Terra. Superimposition of recordings. I'd take several records of music, and play them simultaneously, working in various others now and then and thus make a new recording. At times I'd run them in backwards, lyrics and all. So, after awhile, I got pretty accustomed to hearing common English words spoken backwards. And damned if some of the apparently garbled signals didn't

sound familiar until suddenly it struck me. I was just beginning to set them down when, whup! in comes the interference, then they're straight again, but so faint I can't make them out."

"Joe." called Dorothy softly, "are they always in reverse when they're strong?"

"Why—yes, they are."

"Does Edgar know that?"

"Nope."

She slid off the table. "I think I'd better tell him before he wastes any more time."

"Hold it a moment," protested Nick. "I want to see if we can get anything. Is the power on, Joe?"

"Yeah. Apparently they stopped just an instant after I rang you."

"Any idea when they might be on again?"

"Ought to be a few minutes, Nick. I've found that they apparently repeat each broadcast three times with a few hours interval between units of three." He shoved a slip of paper over to Nick. "Here's what I've managed to make out so far."

Nick picked it up frowning. "Hmm—not much here—it reads 'horribly warped by effects of motion'. . . then there's a blank—'had to stay and one'—damn, another blank."

"That's where it either faded out or interference came in," explained Joe.

"I see. This is where it reversed, eh? 'Left and I am' blank space 'too slight to lift.' That's all."

"Do you suppose," asked Marquis, "that the phrase 'left and I am' might mean that the person sending the signals is the only one left and he's about at his rope's end?"

"Maybe," suggested Bob Vickers, "something happened to the crew as a result of their acceleration. 'Hor-

CHAPTER II

INCREDIBLE WORLD

ribly warped by effects of motion' sounds ominous. Perhaps the crew went bats and they had to land to save the ship. Then something happened to them on the planet so that they 'had to stay and one'—well, maybe he's telling about the ghastly fate of one of them."

"What—what about 'too slight to lift'?" reminded Fred.

"As I recall," said Nick in hushed tones, "there was one outstanding bad point about Dad's setup. The contrasel controls were pretty heavy and it took a strong man to work them alone. If but one man were on the ship, and he sick, or weak from hunger, he couldn't lift those levers." He stared a moment, then added, "Particularly if the gravity on whatever planet the ship is were greater than that of Earth."

"I thought the controls were automatic," protested Dorothy.

"They were. But Dad had manual controls installed just in case."

At this point a wild-eyed, disheveled figure burst in upon them. "I've found them," he cried in a high, strained falsetto. "They're in a tight little orbit around Proxima Centauri."

Dorothy Gilbert took his arm. "Come with me," she whispered. "I have some more data for you; you've done wonderfully."

The two left the room, heads close together. An instant later a faint shriek reached the ears of those in the control room, followed by gibbering noises. Nick made a dive for the exit, to find Edgar cackling faintly to himself as Dorothy led him away. "There, there," she soothed, "it wasn't your fault. Now you just go and get a nice long rest, then we'll help you with the new calculations...."

"**H**ERE IT IS," exclaimed Dorothy wearily, planking down a sheaf of motors. "If you can follow through on this, Joe, we'll find the missing. We keep on straight ahead, at right angles to Earth's ecliptic." She closed her eyes. "Did you know," she murmured to no one in particular, "that Edgar's secret ambition is to purr like a cat?"

"How is he?" asked Nick anxiously.

"In a drunken stupor. After all he's been through I didn't have the heart to say no to him. So he emptied an almost full bottle of the rocket blast." She beamed at Nick. "Edgar has a special name for each grade of alcoholate we distill; this is the stiff one."

"We'll have to make some more of that," declared Marquis. "Heigh ho, it's back to the primitive. Y'know, scientists are pretty sure that savages spend most of their ingenuity in figuring out ways to make better and still better hooch. Disgusting, isn't it?"

"Hang on to your stanchions," yelled Timbie as he pressed a button which would send a warning signal throughout the ship, "we're accelerating." Instinctively they obeyed. Without the contracels, they would have been an obscene mass of mangled protoplasm in the seconds that followed; as it was, they experienced something like the feeling one obtains on the downward sweep of a stiff roller coaster.

"Keep a close check on the direction, Joe," grated Nick.

The impact of acceleration did not

last long, but it was some five minutes before they really felt normal again. Timbie bent over calculations, a frown working its way across his forehead. "I don't like the way this is working out," he muttered.

"Following Edgar's equations?" asked Dorothy, picking up the sheet. She glanced over them quickly. "Nothing wrong here only—jeepers, you're right, Joe! Stop the bus, quick!"

"What's wrong?" demanded Nick.

"Nothing — except that we've passed them. They're behind us now!"

Timbie's hands flew over the controls rapidly. "Some day, after the contracel principle has really been perfected, we're going to have ships that are practically without inertia so long as the power's on. Ships that can stop dead like that without any terrifying results and go back the way they came as neat as the ancient's trains on their tracks. But we have to decelerate slowly or we're basket cases, if anybody ever finds us at all."

"**W**HEREVER they are," mused Nick, "it's going to be one sweet job finding the planetoid in this space. It'll be practically invisible because of the distance from the sun. We may go by it a couple of times." He jabbed a call button sharply then spoke into a mike. "Grenville? What's doing? Oh, you are!" He turned to the others. "Our chemical engineer is turning his inventive genius to a superior blend of the rocket blast. How lovely."

"Noble pastime," put in Dorothy. "The last batch was pretty raw—I think it would have dissolved my teeth if I hadn't swallowed it quickly."

"Listen," yelled Nick. "Lay off the monkey business for a minute and attend. Hop down to the observation room and look for a small planetoid—I don't know—could be any port. Use maximum magnification because it may be small—oh, big enough to hold a ship about this size perhaps. Possibly—quite probably dark. Signal us as soon as you see something."

"If he's been sampling his wares," he's likely to see anything," suggested Marquis.

"That being the case," replied Nick, "you'd better go down and help him, all of you. It's a tough job for one man in any condition."

"Coming?" inquired Marquis of Dorothy. She shook her head.

"Yaaah!" he jibed. "Captain's pet!"

DOROTHY bit her lip. "When I think that we almost went right by it without suspecting.... almost missed it completely, I mean."

Nick clasped her shoulder, his eyes fixed upon the almost invisible planetoid slowly growing before them. "Were you and your brother—very good friends?"

"I scarcely knew him," she murmured. "He ran away from home when I was seven or eight, and we only saw him once in awhile after that. I think it was nearly six years after he first hit out before he came back. He was mature then and I was just a silly adolescent, but I idolized him because he was so famous."

"He spent nearly a whole month with me—with us, that is—about four years before he signed up with your father. But all that seems unreal now. If he's—still alive, I'll probably say 'hello, Harry,' and kiss

him with sisterly affection and be glad he's all right, but it won't really mean much. What about your father, Nick?"

He frowned. "Dad and I were pretty close. Matter of fact, I never called him 'dad' until after he disappeared. It was always Steve. He preferred that; didn't like his own name, though I didn't know about it for a long time.

"I never could figure out the relationships between the other kids I knew and their parents. I always felt sorry for them; you see, Steve explained to me once—it's amazing that I got it the first time—that 'father' or 'dad' or 'pop' was something I'd better call him when other people were around just for the sake of appearances. And, when I was in school, why he was 'my father.' But when we were alone together—or just the three of us, Steve, Mater, and I—we didn't have to be formal at all. We were always the best of friends."

She drew closer to him. "I'd like to meet—Steve."

He looked at her as if it were the first time they were meeting. "Steve would like you, too," he replied.

The alarm clanged for some time before they noticed it.

"Sorry!" exclaimed Timbie as he came into the room. "We've spotted it. It's less than 500 miles in diameter."

He eased himself into the control seat and started to shift them into the proper curve for landing. Fascinated, the three stared out the large port at the rapidly increasing globe before them. Unbroken in surface, it loomed before, a seemingly fantastic and impossible thing, a perfect sphere.

Slowly, prodigiously slow, they approached, coasting gracefully, for

inertia or no, there was still the great mass of the ship to take into consideration. There was something wrong about this—somewhere—then, suddenly, the same thought struck all three of them.

"It isn't a sphere!" voiced Nick. "It just looks that way because of its tremendous speed of rotation!"

Dorothy wheeled out the z-special camera and turned on the power, let it operate for a full minute. Quietly they waited for the automatic developing process, then cut the lights and flashed a projection on the panel in the rear of the room which was ideally suitable for a motion-picture screen. Eyes glued on the meters, Dorothy adapted the flow of film until the images of the planetoid on the panel corresponded to what they saw outside.

"What's the period of rotation?"

"100 per minute. That, to put it mildly, is fast. It must be extremely dense to hang together at all—and even then, made of ultracohesive matter."

AS JOE put it some time later, the business of landing on Hastur (as the planetoid came to be known, Marquis first dubbed it that after some legendary, elemental wind-being; they found out later that Hastur wasn't really the being Fred had in mind, but it stuck nonetheless) was roughly analogous to that of a fly lighting on a spinning top. There was Hastur looming before them in the depths of space, gleaming like phosphor on black velvet, the pseudosphere of it slowly swelling before their eyes. And there was the *Columbia*, a great overgrown cylinder with a turret in the middle—a turret that completely encircled her, because she spun, too,—albeit slowly in comparison to the planetoid—gently

curving in to try to light upon the little world's surface.

What happened? They should have known, but they didn't. The *Columbia* swooped down upon Hastur, like the proverbial falcon upon its prey. Only it wasn't as simple as that, because the ship touched the outer fringe of that terrifically-accelerated rotating atmosphere and bounced off, ricocheted much like a smooth stone splatting across the surface of water.

They weren't ready for that splat. It took them unaware and tumbled them all head-over. Luck was with them and no one slammed into anything sharp or deadly hard. Dorothy nursed Nick's bloody nose and a cut over Marquis' eye which just missed being serious.

The second time they tried it, it was with less elan and more caution. They figured that if they could cut in at a point, cut in at an angle so close to zero that they were virtually parallel to it, slip in like a hypodermic with the grain, so to speak, they might be able to make it. It was a nice idea but it didn't work. They were knocked away again. Only this time all hands were prepared and no casualties followed.

At about then Edgar staggered in wanting to know what was. Briefly they told him. Edgar was amazed. He stood there gaping at them, at, he said, their innocence. Then he raised his hands. "Friends," quoth Edgar, "like little children shall I lead you. Land at the pole."

They made it.

"IT'S ODD, isn't it?" mused Dorothy as Nick helped her up an escarpment.

"What's odd?" Edgar wanted to know.

"That, despite the terrific rotation

of Hastur, we just don't notice it now that we're here. I know why of course. Sheer relativity. But it's still odd, no matter how well you explain it."

"I know," mused Edgar. "The most common way is that of picturing a caterpillar crawling down the vane of a fan toward the center. The fan is rotating at terrific speed; the fan is on an express liner which is zipping through Earth's stratosphere like nobody's business; the stratosphere is following Earth's rotation, and so on. Yet our caterpillar isn't conscious of any motion save his own."

They stood silent for a moment, surveying the scene before them. Curving horizons could be seen on all sides, the uneven terrain before them now and then pierced by upcroppings of rock. Or perhaps metals. Above them no sky but space, dotted with luminaries. Far away a splotch of brightness—their sun. A world of twilight, this was.

Behind them lay their ship, a faintly gleaming cylinder, badly scraped and somewhat battered from landing. They'd prepared a sort of berth by splashing the terrain before them with blasts from the emergency rocket tubes, fore and aft, but the landing had still been rough, not the kind which would leave a ship in full dress paint.

Somewhere before them, precisely how far they could not know, was the lost Orion.

"I think," mused Nick, "that the reason for the odd feeling is that we are so vitally aware of the planet's rotation. After all, Earth is no laggard, either, but it's so damned big in comparison to this, and so few people, relatively have been off it as yet. What I mean is: if your knowledge of Hastur's rotation were strict-

ly theoretical, or if you hadn't seen it from space, the whole thing wouldn't appear to you as it does now."

The going was just a trifle more difficult than covering rocky ground would have been on Earth: Vickers had figured Hastur's gravity as 125% that of Earth.

"Hold it," called out Edgar, punctuating the exclamation by easing himself onto the asteroid's surface. "Does anyone know where we're going?"

"We're off to find the Hartnetts," said Dorothy.

"How nice. And where, pray, may they be?"

"Right here—somewhere."

"Lovely," drawled Edgar, "just lovely. Have any of you stopped to consider how many days and how many weary miles you can cover on this not-as-small-as-it-looks world without finding anything at all except blisters?"

"We tried to contact them," cut in Nick, "but not a peep out of the radio at all. The thing just went dead."

"I'll have to admit," continued Edgar, "that at the very moment I can't think of any better procedure than just striking out in any direction at once. But I rest assured that there is a better way. Therefore, I move that we take it easy until we find one."

"We could use the ship," said Dorothy.

"Inadvisable," objected Nick. "Something tells me we are going to have trouble getting away from this little fiend of a planetoid."

"How about rocket cameras?" cut in Dorothy.

"Huh?"

"I can make them. We'll use just enough fuel to send them up half

a mile or so. They'll take pictures, then glide down. We'll keep an eye on them and see where they land; Edgar will also take calculations while they're up—they'll be sort of periscope photos. Of course we'll get our ship, but we may spot the other one."

Nick tapped the rocky surface pondering. "Only thing wrong with that is: why didn't we see the ship on the way down? We had a much bigger perspective."

"Perhaps too big. Besides we were too well occupied otherwise."

"Okay," sighed Nick. "I can't see any reason for not trying it."

CHAPTER III

MENACE UNSEEN

DOROTHY clasped Nick's hand as firmly as hands can be clasped when swathed in space-mitts. "If the photo didn't deceive us, the ship should be over this ridge."

Nick nodded, shot an impatient glance at the others straggling up the slight incline. Together he and Dorothy mounted the acclivity, peered anxiously at the sweep below.

A little scream of delight came from Dorothy's lips, "There, Nick!"

No doubt about it. The lost Orion lay, partly concealed by upcroppings of rock, less than a mile away. Hastily they made their way down the decline, ran in awkward, elephantine steps toward it. As they approached they could see how beaten and scarred it looked.

They bounded to the port and breathlessly clanged upon it. It was shut tightly. Impatiently they beat upon it until finally it swooshed open and they filed into the airlock. Imperturbably the outer door snapped

close behind them, clamlike, and painfully slow the inner port dragged itself open.

The lost Orion!

The air was pure—that they noticed first of all when they had doffed cautiously their helmets. Pure and warm. Quickly they took off the clumsy suits and looked about them. No one was in sight; no greeting came to them.

"Hello!" yelled Nick.

No answer.

It was not as large as the *Columbia*, this ill-fated craft, but a big ship nonetheless. Hearts beating out ill omens, they searched room after room, finding no one.

"Hello! Hello!" cried Dorothy. Edgar grasped her arm. "Wait," he murmured. "I think I heard an answer."

Silently they followed him, as he led, to a small room. There was a bed, a set of controls—from this point the mechanisms for opening the double doors had been set in motion—a small heating unit, and a large armchair. As their eyes roved about the room, a figure arose unsteadily from the chair and faced them—a tall, gaunt man, white-haired, his eyes looking as if he had been lost for a thousand years.

Wordlessly he stared at them, as Nick stepped forward, his voice husky.

"Steve!"

THE older man looked at him, a sort of dull bewilderment spreading across his face. "Hello, Nick," he said softly. "I was sort of wondering when you'd come. Who are your friends?"

"I'm Dorothy Gilbert," spoke up that person coming forward, "and I think I'd better fix something for you

right away, Steve. You look as if you haven't had a square meal since Sinbad went sailing."

The older man grinned wanly. "Guess I haven't been eating any too regularly. Haven't had much company, you see since—"

"Tell us about it later," interrupted Dorothy. "Edgar, break out the rations and help me with this thing. Looks like an old model."

"Nothing to it," murmured Vickers. "I'm Edgar Vickers," he added in Hartnett's direction; "my brother, Bob, is the slack-mouthed individual you see behind me. There's three other fellows in the party, but they stayed back in the ship."

Hartnett sat down on the bed, his eyes wandering from one to another. "Nice girl you have there, Nick," he whispered. "You're not letting any of these other lads get the jump on you, eh?"

"Not a chance," replied Dorothy without looking up, "I'm after the Hartnett fortune because there's no one else I know who is worth marrying, even for the kind of lab I want."

"Did you write the book you always said you would if you were ever marooned, Steve?" asked Nick.

Hartnett nodded. "Guess that's all that kept me from going nuts. All alone here—not strong enough to do much more than take care of myself, write, and send signals out. Didn't go outside much after—"

Dorothy faced him, her eyes misty. "Don't try to soften it Steve—I knew as soon as I came in the ship. Harry's dead, isn't he? Like all the others?"

Hartnett nodded. "Yes—like all the others."

"THERE'S not much to tell," said Hartnett slowly, after the meal had been finished. "We started out

in the Orion much the same as you did in the *Columbia*, tested the contracels and decided everything was all right. We noticed this little world here and landed to investigate.

"Only we couldn't get off.

"We'd been going virtually at the speed of light and that warped the fourth dimensional fields which were a basic part of the contracels. We found that the only way we had of getting off this planetoid was by rockets, and rockets weren't enough. We just slid along the surface, battered up the ship, then stopped.

"Then we began to find out things about this world. Some of them were interesting, and some—" he broke off suddenly. "Nick, you or none of your party have been out without full suits have you?"

Nick shook his head.

"Good. Don't. This little world is full of radiations, a good deal of which are undetectable, but nasty nonetheless. Seven of our party succumbed before we suspected anything was wrong, and five more died within the next fortnight from perfectly innocent things which must have acted as catalysts.

"So far as we know, an ordinary suit is protection, but we can't be sure."

"What happened to the others?" asked Bob Vickers.

Hartnett was silent for a moment. "When we landed, one of the rocket fuel tanks was ruptured. Not broken open, just cracked enough to let the stuff vaporize and escape. It started to flood the ship gradually, before we found out. We drew lots to see who would seal off the rooms where it had already penetrated, knowing that the chances were a hundred to one that everyone who went would be blown up. It was a suicide job, but those

suicides could keep the entire ship from being blasted to free electrons.

"They did. If you'd come from the other side, you'd have seen the great gaping crater and the hole in the ship."

"I don't understand..." started Dorothy.

"I do," spoke up Nick. "When the Orion left, the only rocket fuel which was any good was HZ 7. It had one fault, however. Let any atmosphere get at it and it would vaporize and seep through practically every known substance, except wax. And that vapor was about ten times as touchy as nitro. When it went off you had a terrific explosion.

"What these fellows did, I take it, Steve, was to seal off the sections from the outside, leaving plenty of room for the vapor to explode, perhaps calculating on its drawing closer while they were at work. Then, they went to work on padding so that the concussion wouldn't completely wreck the ship. Their only chance of escape was completing the job and getting off before the stuff lit up. And working around it was almost a positive guarantee of setting it off."

Hartnett nodded. "That's just about what happened. Three men were on the job of sealing off. That was the sure death assignment, because they would have to be practically entombed inside. Five others were on the padding job; they had a chance of not being smashed to pieces by the concussion if the blow held off long enough.

"But it didn't—not quite long enough. They managed to get their work almost finished. It was just the sheerest luck that the thing didn't fill the entire ship, or go off before some of us were out of the way. That was when we didn't all wait to put on full suits—and it

seemed all right outside. Well, the radiation got the ones who survived the blast."

He buried his face in his hands. "It seems as if it happened ten years ago at times, then I feel, sometimes, as if it had happened yesterday."

DOROTHY slipped her arm around him. "It wasn't your fault. Come, tell us more—about the things you found out about this planetoid."

He raised his head, brow wrinkled in concentration. "There's an odd effect at the horizon—maybe you haven't noticed it yet, eh? The equator of the world seems to be moving, flowing along the ground."

"Yow!" exclaimed Edgar. "Lorentz-Fitzgerald stuff?"

"Huh?"

"Simple," he went on. "The speed of rotation of this planetoid at the equator approaches the speed of light, believe it or not. So the equator contracts. Its diameter remains the same, mind you, since it isn't moving along the line of the diameter, but the circumference grows smaller. And that my friends," he concluded, "makes the mathematical 'pi' a variable so far as Hastur is concerned. Geometry on this planet must be hot stuff—a veritable purgatory for mathematicians."

"How the devil did you figure all that out?" exclaimed Hartnett, a note of awed admiration in his voice.

Edgar grinned. "I'm not staking my life on it," he said, "but it's the only explanation I can think of for the phenomenon you described."

"Well, you may be right, and then again. . . . The important thing, now, is to get off Hastur. These radiations are what got most of us—doesn't make too much difference with me, because I'm old. But I'm assuming," he looked at Dorothy and Nick, "that

you two will be wanting to pair off pretty soon. And I don't think Dorothy would care to start knitting little sweaters with holes for three heads in them after she'd had x-rays taken."

"We'll get off," declared Nick. "Our rockets are powerful enough, I think. We'll take what we can from the Orion—and I suspect that you and your book, Steve, will be all—then scam away from here fast."

He clasped Dorothy's hand. "I only want a hole for one head in that little sweater."

JOE TIMBIE turned to Hartnett and Nick with a despairing gesture. "See? All we do is slide along the ground. I've given her the best blasts we have and there's the result."

"A good thing they've found a new kind of rocket fuel in these last years."

When Dorothy came in, Nick gripped her hands and clung to her. There was no need for words. Silently they looked out of the port onto the scene of their prison, grey twilight world with its sky of starlit black.

Finally he straightened up, reached out and pressed the call-button which would summon all hands to the control room.

"There is nothing wrong with the rocket tubes, or the fuel," he said softly when all had come. "Everything is working as it should work. Our rockets just aren't strong enough to get us off."

"But the contraccels?" burst out Marquis bewilderedly.

Hartnett shook his head. "No good here."

Bob Vickers went over to the window and looked out, staring at the landscape as if there lay an answer

to their problem. "Edgar," he called after a moment, "are you sure about what you said about the equator?"

"No guarantees, but it could very easily be that way."

"Then mightn't an object at the equator be thrown off the planet by centrifugal force?"

Edgar turned to Nick. "It might—matter of fact, it should."

Hartnett bit his lips. "It's a long chance," he said, "but still a chance. If the ship will hold together under the terrific punishment it would have to take, sliding along the ground on our rocket blasts, then we may be able to do it."

"Okay," declared Nick. "Everybody get into space suits, make sure the air-making apparatus is in order, and take your stations. We've got to have lookouts covering all sectors to spot any possible punctures of the hull. As soon as everybody's checked from their posts, Joe, let her rip."

CHAPTER IV

ORDEAL

THEY clung to the stanchions, watching the rocky surface of Hastur lurch by them, even in the protection of their suits horribly jolted by the choppy acceleration. They clung wondering how long the *Columbia* would stand up under a type of punishment for which it had never been designed.

"Something's wrong," complained Timbie. "The fire should take place so that, to my limited senses it seems continuous. It isn't doing that at all." He pressed a button. "I can sense a distinct interval between the release of the firing apparatus and the explosion, and another interval before the reaction shoves us ahead."

"Look at the stars!" cried Bob Vickers.

They glanced in the direction of his pointing finger and gasped. Above them in the inky blackness were no longer the tiny pin-points that they had been seeing so far; they had become huge globes of multi-colored light. And there was one immense thing which visibly swam in the ether.

But it was more than just that. Way out beyond the globes, which looked like glowing baseballs, and basketballs, they caught a flashing something. It grew visibly as they watched, swelled until it seemed that it must batter its way through the mass of luminaries around them, send them in flaming ruin down the surface of the little world. Huger and more terrifying it grew, like a movie closeup, until it filled the entire vista of the heavens. The light should have been blinding; it should have burned out their brains, yet they could behold it without so much as being dazzled. Now the size of it was such that no longer could they see its full circle, but only a section of the titanic surface.

Abruptly the smooth aspect of it faded and sharp prominences began to appear. It was no perfect sphere, this body, but a roughly-circular mass, shot through with enormous cracks, riddled with holes, jagged with mountains. One spire-like protuberance seemed to be pointing directly at them, aiming itself at the ship.

Paralyzed with mingled amazement and terror they stood, bracing themselves for an impact which would destroy them utterly, volatilize them and the ship with such titanic swiftness that their consciousness would be obliterated before any sensations

of it could reach them. They would see the destroyer almost upon them, and that would be all.

But they were wrong. It screamed down out of the night of space above them, not touching their ship, seemingly a good distance away. No concussion wave struck them, yet they saw the surface of Hastur cleft and crumpled before them, saw the monster bury itself in the planetoid. There was a flare of light which made them blink for an instant, and that was all.

"Veer away," gasped Nick. "We don't want to be tumbled into that chasm."

Timbie's fingers darted over the controls, and they were lurched sideways as the *Columbia* went off at a tangent to their former course. The bewilderment of what they had just seen still lay upon them; their minds were numb with the incredibility of it.

Dorothy's eyes met Nick's. "Are we dead?" she whispered. "Were we all killed in that collision and is this but the last flickers of my consciousness?"

"I was wondering that, too," came Nick's voice over the space-phones. "But it couldn't be so if it occurred to you, too. There's some simple explanation for all this, but for the life of me, I can't think what it is."

"Oh-oh," said Timbie, "More fireworks!"

BEFORE them loomed a vast cliff wall, so high that they could not see its top. It had not been there an instant before. Somehow, they could not feel the horror of a few moments back, yet they braced themselves again for a shock.

A sudden jolt wrenched them away from the stanchions; the ship came to a stop as a warning light flickered

ominously on the control board. Yet, as they picked themselves up, the cliff had disappeared; it was not behind them, and before them stretched the familiar surface of Hastur, above them the velvet of space, flecked with pinpricks of light.

"A puncture!" cried Nick. He grabbed the speaker.

"Nick," came the voice of Marquis. "There's a hole about the size of a soup plate in sector seven. Don't worry; we'll be sealing it off directly, and we've locked it off. Call you back when it's done."

"Okay, be careful."

He turned to the others. "We'll be on our way shortly. Anybody see that pit we turned off our course to avoid?"

"It's gone, Nick," said Hartnett, "but the show's still on." He nodded toward the port.

Something was coming over the horizon, something that looked partly like an arm, and partly like a molten river. It was both a flow and a wriggling, and, as they watched, another glowing thing snaked up from behind the distant ridges. This second thing went straight up into the sky, curving out as if looking for something upon which to swoop.

And now the main body of the thing began to be visible. It was vaguely conical, with the apex inverted, the arms of it issuing forth from the sides. A single glowing eye bulged from the top.

"It looks nasty," said Nick, "but I don't think it's very powerful."

"It might bang us up a bit, though," added Timbie.

"The beastie is after something. Look at the way those three arms are swishing around."

The thing was virtually monochrome except for the jet black of the single eye. The arms were flail-

ing in the general direction of the ship, coming closer with each cast. But apparently it had not reached them yet.

"Do you suppose it can't see well?" asked Dorothy.

Before anyone could answer her the creature had already acted. For caught now in one of the brilliant arms was a flattish many-legged thing, looking more like a centipede than anything else. It had a barbed tail like a scorpion, and was writhing and trying to spear the other desperately. But the hunter had calculated well and encircled its prey in such a manner that the barb could not reach it. Closer to the brilliant body the struggling thing was borne, then a slit appeared in the side of the victor, and a deep red orifice grew. The flattish creature was popped into this; the cavity closed with a snap and again the shell of brilliant cone-thing seemed to be unbroken.

"Nice fauna here," remarked Nick. "Did your party ever meet up with that beauty?"

Hartnett grinned. "In a way. But watch closely, now. There's more to come."

The bright cone rested motionless on the ridge, two of its three arms lying motionless. They couldn't see the third, but supposed that it, too, was at rest. Unwinking, the huge eyes stared apparently upward.

But off in another direction what looked like a cloud was approaching. It drifted easily, dropping to the surface now and then and lazing along for a while, then rising up again. The size of it made them gasp. It seemed to be larger than the *Columbia*.

Now the cone-thing was aware of its approach and the bright arms was in play again. Like a fisherman cast-

ing after trout, the arms threw out. The cloud came on until it hovered over the cone-creature, then suddenly it dropped down enveloping it. An instant later it rose and the cone-creature was gone; the whitish cloud started to drift away.

But something was wrong. It didn't move as easily as it had done before; it lurched in a distressed manner.

"What's wrong with it?" murmured Nick.

"Look, it's changing color," cried Dorothy.

A rusty stain had suddenly appeared in the cloud. Before their eyes it grew rapidly, the core of it an angry red, the spreading stain rust. The cloud-thing rose up slowly, but the red spot grew. And as they watched, a bulge appeared in the red, grew like a blister and finally burst. From the cavity the brilliant arms of the cone-thing appeared, followed by the rest of the creature.

It lingered in the opening as the stricken cloud sank slowly to the surface of the planetoid. Now the red stain had almost completely blotted out the normal white of the cloud and they saw that the thing was beginning to crumble where the cone-creature had emerged. It dissolved into a sort of dust leaving the cone-thing in much the same position it had been in before, with the single great eye staring up at the stars.

"I'll be damned," murmured Nick. "It must have poisoned the cloud. But why did the cloud try to eat it, then?"

"These creatures haven't any intelligence at all, apparently," explained Hartnett. "I've seen that happen any number of times. I'd say offhand that the cloud-mass is attracted by something in the cone-creature—per-

haps that scorpion-thing it just ate, because the clouds can envelope them without danger. But the cone-creature is rather well developed as you saw."

THE light on the control board winked. Timbie picked up the phone. "It's Marquis," he said. "They've got the patch on the puncture and we'll be able to go ahead shortly."

"Okay," said Nick. "Tell them to wink when all's ready." He turned to the others. "It doesn't look as if we'll make the equator."

Hartnett smiled grimly. "Well, if we can't get off, we can at least gather some valuable data here on such things as the Doppler effect, the Lorentz-Fitzgerald contraction effect, the Einstein effect——"

"Hey!" burst in Dorothy, "did you say Einstein?"

"That's right. This will be the first opportunity anyone's ever had to get real observational data for primary sources."

"Wait a minute," she continued. "According to Einstein, there's an increase in mass with an increase in speed, isn't there?"

"Correct, but why get so excited about it?"

"Lots of reasons, Nick. We're dopes, that's why. There's no sense in our going to the equator; our mass would be so terrific there that we could never get off."

"But, if there's a point where the centrifugal force will throw us off, it's between here and the equator."

"She's right!" screamed Edgar. "And I'm a seventh order moron not to have thought of it myself. If such a point exists, we must be pretty close to it now."

The light flickered again. "All set," said Joe. "Get ready; we're moving."

Again they grasped the stanchions, their hearts hammering in hopeful anticipation. Now the effect that Timbie had mentioned was painfully apparent. They saw him press the firing button, counted beneath their breath as they waited for the light which would indicate that the rocket had fired correctly—ordinarily, that light flicked so soon after the button was pressed that it appeared simultaneous—then braced themselves for a spurt ahead.

When it came the scene outside had altered again. Now the entire topography of Hastur seemed to be a vast concavity and they were climbing up the rim of the great cup. Ahead of them strange wrinkles appeared in the surface which became normal again as they approached nearer; behind them, the planetoid had become an incline sloping down to the edge where the great globes of stars wheeled in the abyss.

"Are we crazy—or is it Hastur?" burst out Bob Vickers.

Hartnett smiled. "These distortions are purely illusionary. It's the effect of the rotation."

Slowly, strangely slow, the *Columbia* dragged itself forward, sliding along the planetoid's surface, more fantastically distorted to their eyes every instant. Now it seemed to shrink before them until it appeared that the entire world was smaller than their ship, that the *Columbia* was balancing precariously on the ridiculous little globe of it, and the first spurt from the rockets would send them off into space. Then Hastur was an incredible long, winding ribbon, lined with impassable mountains on either side, and they must travel along the millions of miles of it, as on a runway until at last they came to the rim. Then it was a geometrical nightmare, a

riot of planes and angles which hurt their eyes to see; up from the surface reared hideously formed ridges and equally ghastly orifices yawned before them. And before them stretched leagues upon leagues of glassy surface....then....

The weird terrain was slipping away from them; they felt themselves buffeted as the entire ship was rocked violently. "We've hit it," yelled Bob.

Below them Hastur was already a sphere, and, as Timbie's fingers pressed buttons releasing full fire on the rockets, it became again the incredible globe they had seen when approaching it. They were free.

Dorothy raised her hand to her face to wipe away a tear that was streaming down her cheek, smiled despite herself when her mailed finger touched the glassite of her helmet.

"Goodbye, Harry," she whispered.

"**W**E have here," declared Edgar, picking his nose, "a small list of the mysteries of Hastur. So far as I can see, the only way really to break them is to make up another expedition sometime."

"Read 'em off, bucko," said Dorothy.

"First of all—what is Hastur made of? Why, with the terrific speed of rotation, doesn't it fly to pieces?"

"I devoted five pages to that in my book," put in Hartnett. "To sum up briefly: there's no reason I know why it should be, but it is. Therefore, there must be a reason." They glared at him. "Good way of wasting time," he protested.

"Then," continued Edgar, "we have the matter of the reverse English radio reception. And I shall personally slay and dismember anyone who tries to pass it off merely as

'Einstein effect'." He looked up. "Well?"

Dorothy smiled. "We like living, Edgar."

"Speaking of 'Einstein effect,'" broke in Hartnett, "I presume you realize by now that all the weird things we saw were enormously distorted. The stars, for example, were never actually closer. That was easy to realize, because no more than the customary amount of light was visible, and no gravitational eccentricities were noted."

"What about the thing that nearly wiped us out?" asked Bob Vickers.

"A meteor—and a very small one at that. It landed a little distance away from the ship. Had it hit us, it wouldn't have blotted us out, but could have caused considerable damage nonetheless."

"And the—creatures?"

"Microscopic. Had we been able to move at the time, we could have ploughed right through them. I've seen those illusions a number of times—we wasted quite a bit of ammunition on them before we got wise.

"And just imagine their consternation when they saw us, apparently microscopic, too, yet always out of grasp. That's why the cone-creature was flailing away at nothing at all. It was trying to catch us."

"Can you explain wave n?" burst in Edgar.

"I have seven pages on that in my book," smiled Hartnett. "Summed up, I say: wave n was discovered while we were looking for something else. We played around with it until it began to sit up and say 'uncle.' We don't know from nothing about it."

Nick puzzled. "What kind of a book is this, Steve?"

Hartnett laughed. "A joke. A beautiful joke on the dear public. Three hundred pages of pompous drivel, harebrained speculations, pseudo-science, and what not.

"I made a solemn vow many years ago, Nick, that if I ever became an explorer, I would write a book to end all travel books, in retaliation for the ghastly piles of dung about which pedants rave so heartily and which are crammed down the throats of otherwise innocent schoolboys.

"Here on Hastur I had the time to do it—and it was a good way of keeping my spirits up. Oh yes—I worked on solid stuff, too—but that isn't for public consumption; too deep."

"But seriously," broke in Edgar, "haven't you any idea as to the reason for the signals in reverse English?"

"I don't want to be personally slain and dismembered, Edgar. That tabu explanation very frankly is the only one I've found so far. The signals were warped—unless you want something utterly fantastic like their traveling around the universe, or being slipped through the continuum."

"What does that mean?" asked Dorothy.

"Nothing. It's a sort of gibberish which some people use to explain things otherwise inexplicable." He paused as the familiar figure of Grenville, wreathed with beatific smiles, entered the room. "What's in the bottle?"

"I have here," sighed the chemical engineer, "the ne-plus-ultra of our own private rocket-blast. It's smooth!"

"Yeah? What happened to your fingernails?"

"I got hungry!—Okay, if you don't trust me, I'll sample it first." He uncorked the bottle and took a mighty quaff of the curiously-colored contents.

"If he starts rolling over on the floor, kicking feebly, we'll know that it's a good roach spray if nothing else," observed Edgar.

Hastur was behind them now; soon the contraccels would be flashing them back to Earth. Dorothy drew close to Nick, glad that the cumbersome suits were no longer necessary.

It would be a little blue sweater, she thought, just for luck.

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SAKNARTH

by MILLARD VERNE GORDON

(Author of "The Planet of Illusion," "Revolving World," etc.)

"THE LIGHTS upon the Morning Star." How well he remembered that phrase. Twenty years it must have been since Kwarit had whispered it to him, at the great trial where they had accused Kwarit of heeding the signals of the Evil One.

As he had been led away, he had managed to whisper to young Saknarth, then a mere neophyte, the strange phrase that had lingered, echoing and reechoing through the young student's mind all these years. From neophyte to the Master Astrologer of the Imperial Observatory. It would be more than forty years by the third planet's hurried pace. Did the lights still glow upon the Morning Star?

Saknarth glanced over at the chronometer. It would be a half hour before the Morning Star rose. There was work to be done; he must prepare the day's horoscope. He laughed to himself. What fools priests and rulers must be to believe that the stars foretold the future. What an upset of they learned how it all originated in the minds of astrologers—no more the guesswork based upon a knowledge of the past. Well, so far, thought Saknarth, my forecasts have been more or less true.

Seating himself at a little desk in the shaded glow of an oil lamp, he

proceeded to write his prophecies, taking care to befog them with astrological formulae and mystic bosh.

A half hour passed. Already a dim light glowed deep in the eastern horizon. Now from low in the sky a blue star gleamed, a steady glowing mote of light heralding the dawn. The Morning Star.

Saknarth pushed back his stool from the desk and stood up. He glanced through the open panel at the planet. Then over to the largest telescope in the observatory, a twenty inch reflector. He applied his single round eye to the eyepiece and gazed at great Kurnal, largest of the inner planets.

A crescent of brilliant light, the major part of it dark. It was nearing its closest, Saknarth thought. The sun was behind it and the night side was presented to Mars. The thin crescent glowed brightly. He could see dimly dark shading of landmasses in that area, but the rest was dark, unlit.

Saknarth reflected. Here it was that Kwarit had seen his lights, in the dark of the Earth. But then he was using a bigger instrument; he was using the great fifty inch reflector, largest ever made. That had been removed. The priests had said that it was accursed of the Devil and they had taken it and placed it in the

The Master Astrologer was willing to give his life—if only the torch of what little learning existed in the land could be passed on.

Hall of Evil Things. None were permitted to look through it. Saknarth swore softly to himself. Oh for a glimpse through it, for a single glance—

The day was nearly over. Saknarth had delivered his horoscope to the Emperor and had served his moments at the court; now he was wending his way homeward through the narrow streets of Lucas Phoenix. He saw before him a great building, the Imperial Museum. Suddenly a thought struck him; he would like to see Kwarit's telescope.

Accordingly he entered the vast institute. Through the long passages he went, past the exhibits of stuffed beasts and catalogued plants, and the many rooms of ancient empires and lost peoples. Through all these he went into the wing where lay the Hall of Evil Things. This was well guarded he thought. Two helmeted and cuirassed soldiers stood before the entrance. Their single eyes gleamed suspiciously at all passers by, their stumpy horns capped by dangerous looking steel spikes, their hands resting upon huge maces at their sides. They halted Saknarth as he sought to enter, but he showed them his credentials as a member of the Imperial Court and was permitted to pass. Down the hall he strode, past cases of forbidden books, evil robes, devil haunted, and mummeries of all kinds to the very end where, behind an iron railing, stood the telescope.

THE Master Astrologer leaned on the railing and stared at it. The huge mirror, kept in condition by the attendants, gleamed brilliantly. The great instrument at the end of the hall near the window, the Eastern sky visible. The sun rose in sight of that window, and the Morning Star.

From where the telescope stood, it should be possible to train it on the planet.

The Master Astrologer became excited; he glanced around hurriedly for fear someone might have witnessed. Then carefully he took in all details of the lay of the room, turned and walked out.

It was dark. A chill wind from the deserts swept through the deserted streets of the Martian capital. A period of deepest silence when even the eternal thumping of the canal pumps died down to a dull distant hum. In the dim stretches of the hour before dawn the city was at its quietest. On the street corners a few sleepy guards leaned against walls and closed their single great eyes in rest for a moment.

Down a side street in the darkest shadows slipped a figure. Dark cloaked, treading upon cushioned toes, it crept from building to building, keeping as much as possible in the recesses of arches of the little carved balconies Martian buildings are wont to have. Finally the figure came to a halt in a doorway. It stood for a moment looking around to make sure of the place and then producing a long thin instrument, picked the lock and rolled aside the door.

Saknarth stepped softly inside the dark hallway, rolled the door shut. He listened a moment, then assured by silence tip-toed forward up the incline that he knew lay to one side of the hall. Up he climbed. Reaching a floor, he turned quickly and groped for the next incline, reached it and ascended again. Soon he came to where there were no more floors, and pushing aside a trap door, stepped out on the roof.

It was not so dark up here. The dim lights of the two tiny moons

added to the lights of the myriad stars to cast a misty white glow upon objects.

The astrologer tip-toed silently across the roof onto an adjoining one. On he progressed to come finally to the great wall of a building looming up above. Set in this wall was a large window about fifteen feet above his head.

Saknarth groped under his cloak, drew out a long thin rope. To the end of this he fastened a small, strong double hook making an effective grappling iron.

He stepped back, whirled it around his head and tossed it upwards. It struck the wall just below the sill, bounded back. He waited and listened; no one had heard. Again he tossed the rope; and this time the hook caught in the carved decorations of the window sill.

Saknarth pulled; the rope held. He whispered a short prayer and grasping high on the rope raised his feet off the ground. Immediately he swung inward to touch the wall with his feet. Then, slowly and laboriously, climbed up the rope.

Reaching the sill, Saknarth threw a leg over and lay quiet for a moment. Still safe. He drew out his lock-picking instrument and easily opened the window enough to permit him to creep through and drop silently on the other side.

The long hall was dark and quiet. No one had heard him. He looked up. There next to him loomed the great telescope.

SAKNARTH stepped over the railing and perched himself on the observer's seat. He polished the eyepiece fondly, grasped the hand wheels. Turning these, he swung the heavy instrument downwards, down

till it faced the open window and the coming dawn.

There, low in the heavens hung the Morning Star. It glowed brightly and seemed to beckon and encourage him on. He set the readings on the clockwork adjustment, applied his eye to the lens.

A brilliant crescent shining with the blue green radiance of the third planet. Much larger than ever the Master Astrologer had seen it. He stared eagerly at the now sharply outlined land masses visible, noting the green color of some and wondering if it could be the green of vegetation.

He drew his gaze from the bright crescent to stare at the dark portion. It was not truly dark. A dim grey light seemed to show up vague suggestions of continents and seas, the reflected light of Kurnal's huge moon, he thought. But the lights: he must look for the lights.

Long he stared and suddenly he saw them. A tiny dot of white light glowing in the center of the dark disc. Now several others caught his view; his heart thumped wildly. The lights were there; Kwarit had spoken truthfully. He stared avidly at them. Cities, he thought: could they be cities? He dismissed the thought as soon as it had come as being foolish. There were many. He tried to count them. Most were in the Northern half, yet there were one or two in the southern zone, too. Many on top and a few below. A strange sense of having seen that design before entered his mind. The arrangement was peculiar; he studied it closely.

The Sign of Dallon! He recognized it. The ideograph of Dallon the prophet was exactly like that. The Sign of Dallon on the face of Kurnal. The prophecy. He remembered it from his student days.

Dallon, one of the ancient founders of the priesthood, had declared; "Man shall be humble and bow down to the gods; he shall revere those who are their priests and prophets; he shall not deem to impose upon their domains and shall support and obey them. This shall be until the Sign of Dallon shall appear on the face of the Morning Star. Then will Man rise above the gods. And that time is Never."

The time had come; the priesthood should no longer enslave mankind. Now was learning and enlightenment to come to the people to give them conquest over fear and misery. And he, Saknarth, must tell the multitudes.

He continued thus, in his reveries, his lone eye glued to the great instrument, his mind seething with a multitude of thoughts.

A STEP sounded in the darkness. A hand was laid roughly upon his shoulder. He was jerked away from the eyepiece to face the two guards that had been patrolling the halls of the Museum. Saknarth opened his mouth. "I have seen on Kurnal—" he began, but a soldier clapped his hand over the astrologer's mouth and said gruffly, "Silence. Let not your mouth tell of the blasphemies seen through this instrument of the Devil." They gagged Saknarth and bound his hands and led him out of the hall, turned him over to imprisonment.

His trial was short and speedy. During the entire proceedings he remained gagged and bound so as to be unable to utter the blasphemies he might have seen. The priests passed quick judgment upon him for had he not been caught peering through the accursed instrument? There was naught for such but execution.

The guards led him out of the courtroom that morning and took him to a cell overlooking the place of execution. Here for the first time he was ungagged and unbound. The door rolled shut upon him and the locks clicked.

Saknarth gazed out of the barred window. The street was many feet below. He could not possibly shout down to the passers-by what he had learned. He looked wildly around him.

On a little table was parchment and crayon. He grasped these and quickly drew a series of ideographs. He wrote furiously for he had not much time.

He wrote about the lights and the Sign. He exhorted the reader to carry it to the astrologers and the men of learning. He declared the time had come to rise and strike for freedom.

Rising, Saknarth went over to the window, waiting. There were many going through the street below, but he waited for the best. There! A young man passing now. Upon his arm was the circle insignia of the Society of the One God. An intelligent look was in his eye.

Saknarth grasped the rolled manuscript and hurled it. Straight before the youth it fell. The young man picked it up, drew aside into a doorway opposite to read it. Hopefully the prisoner watched the expression on the youth's face, saw light spring into his eyes, saw a smile and a determined line spread over his face.

The reader looked up. Straight into Saknarth's eyes he gazed, then raised his hand in salute and hurried off down the street.

The Master Astrologer sat down upon his stool, waiting for the executioners. He was ready to die now; he had done his work.



She introduced him to the First Lady.

GANGWAY FOR HOMER

C'mon out of the shadows, Homer: Here's one who claims you as his patron. Unstring your lyre, mighty bard and sing the epic of Achilles Maravain, who can't be hurt by bullets, bombs, or blasters, and whose touch brings instant death!

Illustrated by John Forte

HIS NAME was really John Smith. Incredibly enough, it had always been John Smith. As far back as people in his circle and neighborhood could remember, it had been John Smith—and they could remember back all the way to when he had been a mere tottering tot—to the swaddling clothes days. He was what might be called a medium man. His height was medium. His middle-age was medium. His hair, eyes, and nose were medium. Unpretentious he looked and adequate. He fulfilled his name, which, as we mentioned above, was John Smith—not Achilles Maravain. Yet she persisted in calling him Achilles Maravain. She declaimed;

by GEORGE R. HAHN

she cried out; she excited herself and all present—all to the effect that John Smith was Achilles Maravain. Everybody paid her the best of attention, although they couldn't believe her. Everybody regarded her with interest. She had a wild, pale, exotic-looking face, a figure ~~it~~ would be indelicate to remark upon, and legs that were crystallized ecstasy. They listened to her words; they gazed upon her. The Los Angeles Forum of Camera Arts gazed to satiety on face and figure and legs and sighed en masse. Insanely gay sighs, sighed they. She was desirable and moreover she had interrupted President Soupy's discussion of "Repentance," a camera study in monotone by Pierre de la Bardier. Had you ever listened to President Soupy remarking that such and such was "taken on a Zeiss Super Iconta B with Metchnormatic Ultra-Lite film at an exposure of f5.6 with diaphragm—, etc.," you too would have been gay—aye, insanely gay—to have had him interrupted by a luscious looking pair of legs like that. Thus, everybody was happy. The LAFCA was happy; the lost-looking scientist with the galvanometer and other trivia was happy, and the three dapper young men were happy. Even John Smith was happy.

His happiness was obvious in the reluctance with which he took his departure, in his formality. He rose from his seat and said to the three dapper young men, of the hard, virtuous faces, "The Federal Bureau of Investigation, I presume?"

"Right," crisply, youngishly. "John Smith, alias Achilles Maravain, you are under arrest on charges of murder, seditious conduct, and high treason against the government of the United States. Will you come along quietly?"

Achilles—for it is as such he is to be referred to forever hence—did not come along quietly. He did not come along. In point of fact, he went his own way. The three grim young men of the FBI bitterly contested his going, and, since, as everyone knows nowadays, to touch Achilles Maravain was to undergo collapse, disintegration, and death, the results were unfortunate.

THIS was the first and perhaps most important incident in his history. It was the acorn from which sprouted that large and aberrant oak-tree that was Achilles Maravain.

The next important incident—a scene perhaps even more diverting than the last—was the Lincoln Heights scene. As the odds are against it that the reader of this is either an archeologist or some pervertedly informed devotee of ancient Los Angeles topography, it is excusable to mention that Lincoln Heights was the jail of the city, an institution comparable in purpose to our modern concentration camps, but differing in that it was merely a squat, few-story cement structure abundantly furnished with steel bars, locks, chains, gyves, paraphernalia, and policemen. Its architecture was thus ideal for Achilles' purposes. His purposes being to imprison the prison, purposes in which he succeeded.

His remarkable feat first manifested itself when Sergeant Leery crashed titanically into nothingness. Not actual nothingness—as was evidenced by its palpability—but a substance that, for all practical purposes, was nonexistent; all practical purposes that is except that of preventing exit or entry in regards to the Lincoln Heights jail. Sergeant Leery withdrew his nose a few paces, vigorously rubbing that injured

member, and stared quizzically at this absurd tangibility. He stared for a long and ponderous time and then began shouting. Minions of the law popped miraculously into view at this point, as if conjured there by the magic of Leery's stentorian voice. Miraculously they popped and popping, equally miraculously popped no more. The invisible barrier restrained them; it framed their popping faces, their popping eyes. It kept them within the building, sealing the doors, the windows, the walls. It was, in fact a prison; Achilles Maravain had imprisoned the prison.

Had he stopped there, there's a shade of a ghost's super-attenuated chance that all might have been forgotten, except perhaps by the infuriated gendarmerie and prisoners who were left permanently to their own devices within the Lincoln Heights jail. But Achilles didn't stop. He visited the First Street Headquarters Jail and imprisoned it. He visited all the jails. Likewise the insane asylums and the hospitals. Personal appearance tour, it was; an interstate tour. He went to Salt Lake City and there gave a repeat performance. Jails, hospitals, etc. Thence to Denver; thence to Topeka; thence to Kansas City. Followed by St. Louis. Followed by Indianapolis. And on all the way to the East Coast.

It is not to be supposed that he was uncontested in this progression. Very much to the contrary. He was shot at. Often and with the utmost accuracy was he fired upon. Apparently, however, with no effect for he seemed invulnerable.

Not elusive was our Achilles, not wily, not adroit. Not even clever. He was merely invulnerable and clumsily so to boot. He would wade into a mass of stalwart police or soldiers—the militia tried cannons on

him—and projectiles would simply bounce away from him. They would explode in the conventional manner. Only no fragments or concussion waves apparently could reach him. After this, the opposition would be scattered like the proverbial chaff.

It was a melee, a very horrifying and immensely entertaining mess. Chaos there was and wildness and fantasy and even fanaticism. Yes, even the latter. 'This last was instanced the time a group of misdirected fans of Achilles misconstrued him, and, in the belief that he was the Almighty, surrounded him in the midst of the pursuit of one of his more stirring enterprises. He misconstrued them, too. They still remain, so far as is known, in the housing he provided their zeal.

NOW we return to the beginning of the story. Not for the sake of confusion, but merely to pick up a most important thread. Remember the Camera Forum scene? And Los Angeles? Los Angeles, if you are following the mood of this story, is mere dust and collapse by now. Nevertheless, we return to the vanished metropolis and to the Forum, the three young men of the FBI, and to the lost-looking scientist with the galvanometer and other trivia—the scientist whom you probably never noticed, having been lost in the spell of her. The lost-looking scientist was happy, too.

His happiness lay in that he had come to a conclusion, one affecting Achilles Maravain. His conclusion was that Maravain was scientifically explainable. Not just his feats; not just the decimation he wrought upon police; not just the prisons in which he enveloped prisons. No—more than that—the works. Everything about Achilles Maravain—his per-

sonality; his attitude toward life, love and literature—all down to his very kneejerk.

First and most important of all, our Achilles had an inferiority complex. Definitely. The proposition that anyone who had actually, with reason, been called John Smith all his life did not have an inferiority complex was fantastic. But the man's actions proved it beyond doubt: he picked on criminals, insane, and the sick because he felt inferior to them, and compensated thus. Amazing logic? Well, everyone thought so at the time, although as you can see, it was really extraordinarily simple.

But, at the time, everyone was amazed, even the scientist himself. He gloried in it, glowed and, entering further into the spirit and tempo of his theories, babbled out point after telling point. Argued. Philosophized. He quoted statistics about the ratio of invention to the inferiority-complex and compared it with the results Achilles had obtained. He proved that ultra-vibrational force-walls—this being essentially what Achilles had developed for the demolition of law and order and for the production of honestagawd, fool-proof, tamper-proof prisons—were Machiavellian, Mephistophelian, and just plain hellish. Why invent them, then, except to demonstrate a superiority the inventor really didn't feel?

The scientist meditated further, brooded, calculated, grunted awhile and then predicted—or, as he put it: prognosticated—that Achilles would declare himself a dictator.

Which Achilles did.

In this, however, there was a flaw; here lay his weakness. Not in the actual fact that he protested himself the greatest and wisest of men, but that he attempted wiles. He didn't

come out with it forthrightly; he wasn't blunt as he had been with his interesting massacres. He proved himself cagey, contemptible, striking the Humanitarian pose. He was, he stated, producing all these absorbing newspaper stories for man's own good. Or, rather, Man's. Man with a capital M. A document he issued, long and scholarly. It reeked; it stank; it was crawling with hypocrisy and shoddy diplomacy. He took some thirty thousand words to indicate that pestilence, famine, and war was in existence. That thieving, murder, and kindred rot was also in evidence. He dithered about the general theme that this was horrible. Tediously he pedanted, hedging around concerning the Perfect State, eventually coming out into the open with his own private Perfect State plan. Revised and condensed it still reeked. Get rid of all the misfits and criminals and the insane. Prison up the squarepegs and breed them out. And then direct democracy just as the Greeks had.

Apparently he had never heard of economics. No one had told him that Greek democracy existed on the basis of a slave system. No one had told him of other things that had either been thought of, worked out, or had evolved according to the scientific laws concerning economics and society since the time of the Greeks. Achilles Maravain was stuck on Homeric Greek democracy—only he indicated that he, personally, would be Democrat Number One.

A GAIN we bewilder the reader with a thread from the beginning. Again we return to the Los Angeles Camera Forum Scene. This time to call to the mind of the elated reader that succulent item of femininity that first claimed our attention with her sprightly uncovering

of Achilles Maravain as the seemingly innocuous John Smith.

We find Cecile Douve, as she is known to the intelligence services of this and perhaps a few other countries, in a stinky little bedroom. Again don't get ahead of the story; she is merely investigating. Not engaged in active inquiry, if you follow me.

This stinky little bedroom, with massive volumes of a technical nature, broken test tubes, and other rot and junk of a like nature littering it, is the erstwhile bedroom of Achilles Maravain. He no longer inhabits it, although we can linger nostalgically for a moment, although we can sniff mystifiedly at the—peculiar—odors emanating from the broken test tubes, although we can tinker with the gimcracks and thingumbobs and machinery and no doubt shock ourselves into a reckoning with Old Scratch.

In any case, Cecile Douve is here searching for a clue to the whereabouts of Achilles. The scientist of the galvanometers is also here. His name is Harold Boscoe, and he is a Ph. D. Together, Cecile and the Ph. D. search and also engage in polite converse. They sniff not, mystifiedly or otherwise; they linger not on anything nor brood about the fact that perhaps here, in this very, very room was conceived the diabolicism of the force-wall. No, they search and converse.

"It must not happen. The man is a maniac," postulates Cecile prettily, then continues the efficient search.

"Honeybunch,"—evidently the poor egg has joined the clan of the lovelorn—"it shall not. I shall find something to combat him and his evil."

"Do you think you can do it, my pet?"

"Certainly. I'm a scientist, am I not? Just between you and me (and a few governments: Auth. Note) I'm working on something already. I have a magnificent conception that may well prove his downfall."

"Do you really think so? You're so wise—so—so marvelous."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes," a pause, then in husky tones, "really."

Embraces, osculations, and speeches. At precisely the right moment, when his devotion is white hot, she molds him and sends him back to work.

AT approximately this same time, there is going on a very important meeting of various high and significant officials of the government: the President, Vice President, Cabinet Members, House Committee on Achilles Maravain, Senatorial Investigation Committee on Achilles Maravain, the current successor to the Dies Committee, and the First Lady. Hubbub, clamor, chaos. The authoritative voice of the President lifts.

"Silence, please."

The Chairman of the House Committee on Achilles Maravain rises and addresses the President. "Mr. President," (cough), "we are led to believe that these are the facts of the case. There is (or are) a person (or persons) calling himself (or themselves) Achilles Maravain, who has been (or have been) imprisoning prisons, causing no end of annoyance and embarrassment, and who has (or have) proclaimed what purports to be the constitution of a new American state, founded after the manner of our Grecian predecessors in the experiment of democracy. The experiment of democracy, which, may I say, gentlemen" (voice takes ora-

torical tones) "has fulfilled all the most rosy hopes and expectations, which has turned a barren wilderness of thirteen original states into the magnificence and resplendency of—"

"We are all aware of that, Mr. Ainsworth." The President's grimace could rightly be termed sinister.

The Chairman sits down abruptly and the President continues. "In any event, gentlemen, we are confronted by a profoundly serious situation, coming as it is, at a time when we should bend every effort toward preparing for a war against the Old World. This person (or persons) known as Achilles Maravain is having a distressingly diverting effect upon us when all energies from that—er, madman—in Europe. Beyond doubt he is some pseudo-idealistic radical—perhaps an emissary of the Federation. Whatever he is, he has no full cognizance of the extreme gravity of our situation, and, as such will not assist us. Thus, he (or they) must be destroyed. What might any of you gentlemen suggest towards the speedy expedition of this destruction?"

The First Lady arises. "I'm not a gentleman," she simpers, "but—"

"Quite true. Sit down, please."

"Wait a moment. I have something to suggest. Perhaps you do not realize it, but I am indirectly responsible for the uncovering of Achilles Maravain, in Smith's clothing. It was one of my girls, Cecile Douve, who did the job. And we—she in active duty, and I as her patron—are continuing our efforts. As once she wormed her way into his affections, so shall she do it again. As once she effectively uncovered him, so shall she do a second time. I really promise you results, gentlemen. Results."

AND results she got. Results they were. The web, the power expended, the intricacies of thought, the drive of five hundred individuals were her results. The huge rolling mass of energy that was exhausted by five hundred highly specialized and superbly trained and educated beings was the result she directed against the insidious Mr. Maravain. And, most important of all, one person named Cecile Douve. Four hundred and ninety-nine engineers, scientists, technicians, and one little lump of hotcha generally known as Cecile Douve.

"I love you," she said.

Achilles replied. "The last time I believed that, you called in the FBI as witnesses to our mutual affection."

"I was mad, my darling. I didn't understand you." (Hushed, reverent tones.) "Even then I felt violently attracted to you, to you as a man, but your purposes and powers seemed so fearful . . . I thought you were a madman and myself a monster to love you. But now I know . . . when I read your wonderful proclamation, I realized how wrong I had been—how gentle and idealistic you are. I understood then your purity and realized the nobility of your aspirations.

"I love you."

She moved in for the clinch.

"It would only be fair to warn you," he replied, "that I still have the force screen armoring me. Cuddling under these conditions would be quite inadvisable."

She recoiled in a somewhat unamorous fashion.

"Still," he continued, "I love you, too. I don't want to trust you—but I do. Don't look hopeful my dear—I don't completely. Just to a certain, reasonable degree. So, here's what: if my noble aspirations pan out, as

I can't help but expect they will, I'll marry you. In the meantime, we can be friends. We can conduct a pleasant, frolicky little association, however—an entirely platonic one."

He sighed. "Would that Homer were alive today to write the story of Achilles Maravain as it should be written. Will I have poets worthy of me?"

This, she thought, could go on indefinitely. "How soon will it be?" she broke in. "When will you succeed? Can you make it very soon, my dearest?"

"It can't be any too soon for me, either, dewdrop—but restrain yourself."

"I can't—oh, I can't!" she cried. Heavy breathing, then, in more serious tones. "I know what to do. I have influence in Washington. I'll arrange an audience for you with the President. With the President and all of Congress. They'll see you."

"Nice of them, but I don't see the use of it."

"It might be of inestimable use, my darling. A direct impact of your personality and honesty and drive should convince them. It would be almost certain to convince them; they're only human, my dear. And think of the time and trouble we can save if they are ready to give in gracefully. Please!"

"Very well," he sighed. "I'll do it. Don't think for a moment I don't suspect treachery, my pet, but after all, I am invincible. You know that, I hope."

AND on this note ends the reconciliation. Immediately followed by much ado. Preparations while four hundred and ninety-nine engineers, etc., work in a veritable frenzy. And, out of their efforts and energy, there grows an amphitheatre,

large and capacious. Pretty and modern. Beautiful.

This was to be the scene of the meeting. Here is to be decided the fate of more than a hundred and thirty million people. Here is to be expounded the rules and laws of a state founded on Grecian lines, on the classic examples.

Here, on March 15.

Beware of the Ides of March, O Caesar.

Glorious, powerful, invincible Achilles Maravain comes to the amphitheatre. Nowadays with the details and obscurities of the episode in history shuffled into relative inconspicuity, one doesn't know precisely how the cards fell or get the subtleties of the deal. Did any soothsayers annoy our equivalent of Caesar on his route; did his non-existent Calpurnia dream gorily the night before; did lionesses whelp in the streets, or did fierce, fiery warriors fight upon the clouds "which drizzled blood upon the capital"? Gangway for Homer, or even Shakespeare. Either of these two could have done justice to our play.

In any case, Achilles ignored whatever omens there might have been and came to the amphitheatre on March 15.

Cecile met him at the great, modern-looking portal and led him in, introducing him to her benefactress, the First Lady, who, in turn consummated the formalities with the President himself. Achilles was very well-behaved throughout these presentations, conducting himself with decorum and consideration for all the people who eyed his much-publicized armor with especial dubiety. He was very pleased with himself about the whole thing. All these key figures, these obstructions to his philosophy, this destructible humanity, ponder-

ous, ripe so to speak for explosions and force walls—and he showing such admirable restraint about it all. Indeed, he felt content. Restraint, control, self-discipline—these his watchwords.

The President didn't take him by the hand, the force wall preventing—but he did the next best thing. He preceded him to the raised dais in the centre of the amphitheatre and, from the spot, delivered a fetching little introduction about which no more severe a criticism can be applied than "superfluous." After this, Achilles began his talk.

Here also is the ubiquitous scientist of the lost-looking face. Apparently a member, if not a chieftain, of the clan of the four hundred and ninety-nine technicians. He is looking remarkably heroic at the moment. Almost gigantic—in a spiritual sort of way.

He turns and throws a switch.

And, in the amphitheatre, a globular hemisphere descends upon the dais supporting Achilles Maravain, immediately transforming him into a raging Achilles. A half-spheroid, transparent, glassy, but immensely malleable and tensile and strong.

UPSTAIRS in the little room in which stands the heroic and lost-looking scientist, the door flies open. Cecile Douve, betrayer extraordinary, hotcha extraordinary flies into his arms.

"Darling, the hemisphere is cracking—he's winning out. What'll he do to me?" All this excitedly. Then, ruminatively, almost sadly. "He won't want to marry me now."

"Never fear, my sweetness," replies the chieftain of the four hundred and ninety-nine. "We will win out. Earth science shall triumph. The hemisphere is just makeshift, to hold him in one spot for a minute or two. Earth'll really get going in a sec. Earth is insuperable. Classicism he wanted and classicism he'll get. Remember the first Achilles? He had a vulnerable spot. His heel!" The lost look was replaced by a malevolent grin, sage and content. "Achilles Maravain has a heel, too. It couldn't be protected by the force wall, could it? He doesn't walk on an inch of apparent nothingness does he? No. He's vulnerable, just as his Homeric predecessor. And we don't have to use clumsy poisoned arrows on this"—sneering emphasis—"heel." A wild laugh. "We just throw a shot of good old electricity into him."

On the dais, the violent, raging figure of John Smith, alias Achilles Maravain, colossus of the classics, exponent of the ages, Caesar omnipotent, stiffens convulsively as a couple of hundred thousand volts of electricity crisps his flesh. For a long moment, what is left of him remains upright. Then, quietly it falls.

Achilles number two seeks out his illustrious predecessor in Elysia.

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CRISIS!

When the Diplomacy Bureau at home is composed of hopeless incompetents, the Venusians are rattling the sabre, and it looks as if an utterly senseless war is going to result, a little screwball stuff can be forgiven—if it works!

IF THE Karfiness hadn't cut herself badly while she was trimming her chelae one morning the whole mess might never have happened. But fashion decreed that the ropy circle of tentacles about the neck of the female Martian would be worn short that year, and everybody in the Matriarchy, from Girl Guide to the Serene Karfiness herself, obeyed without question.

That was why her temper was short that morning, and why she snapped at the Venusian Plenipotentiary who had come to chat with her concerning the space-mining rights for the following year. The worthy lady glowered at the gentleman from Venus and whistled: "By the Almighty, if you fish-faced baboons so much as try to lay a flipper on a single free electron between here and Venus I'll blow your water-logged plahet out of space!" And, unfortunately for the Venusians, she had the navy to do it with.

The principles of compensation operated almost immediately; the Plenipotentiary ethered back to Venus, and Venus severed diplomatic relations with Earth. Should you fail to grasp the train of events, stop worrying. Those are the facts; the Karfiness cut herself and Venus made warlike noises at Earth.

Earth was in a very peculiar situation. Only a century ago it had be-

gun really intensive spacing, with freight-exchanges and mining. Venus and Mars and, in a smaller way, the Jovians, had been a space-culture for millennia. Earth did not have the elaborate machineries of Foreign Offices and Consulates, Embassies and Delegates and Envoys that the other planets maintained. Terra had gone into the complicated mess of astropolitics with her eyes serenely closed and the naive conviction that right would prevail.

TO THE cloistered Bureau of Protocol in Alaska came a message under diplomatic seal from the Ambassador to Venus, right into the office of Code Clerk Weems.

Carefully he scanned the tape and lead that closed the pouch. "At it again," he said finally. "I sometimes wonder if the whole thing wouldn't go smash if we read our own mail before every other Great Power in space."

Dr. Helen Carewe, his highly privileged assistant, opened the pouch with a paper knife and a shrug. "Take it easy, career man," she advised. "Your daddy had the same trouble before they promoted him to Washington State. We get all the dirty work here in Nome—have to explain how and when and why the inviolable mail-sacks arrive opened and read." She scanned the messages

by **CECIL CORWIN**

heavily typed on official paper. "What," she asked, "does 'Aristotle' mean?"

"Inexcusable outrages on the dignity of a representative of Terra," said Weems after consulting the code book. "Sounds bad."

"It is. Oh, but it *is*! They took Ambassador Malcolm and painted him bright blue, then drove him naked through the streets of Venusport."

"Whew!" whistled Weems. "That's an 'Aristotle' if I ever heard one! What do we do now?" He was already reaching for the phone.

"Cut that out!" snapped Dr. Ca-

rew. She could speak to him like that—or even more firmly—because she was more than old enough to be his mother. The number of career men she had coached through the Alaska Receiving Station would fill half the consulates in space—and with damned good men. Brow wrinkled, she brooded aloud, "While this isn't definitely spy stuff we ought to know whether they have a line on our phones. Don't get Washington; try Intelligence in Wyoming."

MEETLY Weems rang the Central Intelligence Division. After a hasty conversation he turned to



Dr. Carewe: "They say that we're being tapped—probably by Martians. What do I do?"

"Thank the man nicely and hang up," Weems obliged.

"Now," said Dr. Carewe, "the sooner Washington hears of this, the better. And if the Martians hear of this later, *much* better. What we have to avoid is the Martians' being able to let the Venusians know with any degree of credibility that Earth is very, very angry about the Aristotle. Because that will get Venus very angry and virtuous. Which will get Earth very dignified and offensive; snotty, I might even say."

"I notice," commented Weems, "that Mars is practically out of the picture. Except as a silent purveyor of fighting ships to both sides, is it?"

"It is. You learn quickly and cleanly. We'll have to go to Washington ourselves with the pouch."

"And report," said Weems, "to—oh, my God!—Osgood!"

"Exactly," said she. "Oh, my-God Osgood."

And there was good and sufficient reason for the alarm in her voice.

IN THE chaste marble structure that housed the diminutive Foreign Office that Terra thought it sufficient to maintain there were to be found persons who would be kicked out of any other department of the government in two seconds flat. But because astropolitics was something new to Earth and because there had to be some place made for the half-witted offspring of the great legislative families this chaste marble structure housed a gallery of subnormals that made Bellevue look like the Princeton Institute for Advanced Research on a sunny day. Or so the junior members thought. Not the

least of these half-witted great ones was Jowett Osgood, the direct superior of Weems, to whom he would naturally report.

Weems and Carewe were announced with a strange pomp and circumstance; they entered the big office to find Osgood rudely buried in what was supposed to look like work. Weems stood dumbly as Dr. Carewe coughed sharply.

"Ah!" grunted Osgood, looking up. "What is it?" He was a gross man.

"A pouch from Venus. We decoded it and we think it deserves your immediate attention. We didn't phone the contents because of tappers on the wires." Weems handed over the decodings, marked very prominently in red: CONFIDENTIAL—MAKE NO COPIES.

Osgood scanned them and heaved himself to his feet. "Gad!" he grunted. "We must brook no delay—arm to the teeth!" He turned on his dictaphone. "Henry!" he snorted. "Listen to this! To Bureau of Protocol—" Dr. Carewe snapped off the dictaphone and shoved him back into his well-padded chair.

"This," she said between her teeth, "is entirely up to you. Take it from us, immediate action is demanded to smooth over this incident. You won't be able to pass the buck onto some other department; this is right in your lap. And you won't be able to delay the affair until you've forgotten it; even you can see that. Now *what are you going to do?*"

Osgood considered the matter with great dignity for two full minutes. Finally he announced: "I don't know."

"My suggestion is that you appoint Mr. Weems here a sort of goodwill ambassador for special, but very vague, work. And give him an unlimited expense account. This thing

mustn't get any further. Keep it between us three that the message arrived officially on Earth. The fiction will be that it was lost in space and that nobody has received official confirmation of the Aristotle. Any unofficial reports will be considered as sensational tales concocted by newscasters. That's the only way to keep Earth off the spot. And what a spot it is!"

"I see," said Osgood. "Be advised that I shall follow your suggestions—as closely as is compatible with the dignity of this Office."

Outside she informed Weems: "That last was face-saving and nothing else. From here we go to Venus—spreading sweetness and light. Always remember, young man, that our interceptor rockets are pretty good, but that the Venus bombers are pretty *damned* good."

"War," mused Weems. "Nobody wins, really—it wouldn't be nice to see New York blown to pieces, even though we could do exactly the same to Venusport. Sweetness and light it is."

VENUS politics are no joke. The fish-faced little people have at least two parties per acre and the dizziest system of alliances and super-alliances that ever bewildered a struggling young diplomat. Typically there were absolutely no points of agreement among any of the parties as to foreign policy, and yet the Venusian Embassies spoke with authority that was backed up by a united planet. Their military forces were likewise held in common by all the countries, but there were "state militias" engaged in intramural activities and constant border-fighting.

Weems knew the language, and that was one very great advantage; also he spent the long rocket trip

to the foggy planet in learning what he could of the political set-up. He arrived with a fanfare of trumpets; at the pier he was greeted by a score of minor officials. It was a deliberate insult from the Venusian army, for not a single high-ranking officer was present. He glossed it over for the sake of a splendid ovation from the populace of Venusport, who were thoroughly hopped up with esteem for him. He was the shining young man who would assure peace and prosperity for the two inner planets, and the populace was all for him.

But, he knew very well, if one nasty word came from Earth, officially recognizing the Aristotle, their mood would change suddenly and savagely. And that was what he had to be ready for. He didn't trust the fat-headed Osgood.

From city to city he made a grand tour, speaking with very little accent before huge audiences of the little people and meeting few really high-up officials. Everywhere he went he met with disapproval from the public officers.

"How," he complained to Dr. Carewe, "they get together on a complicated issue like disliking me, I don't understand."

With a grim look about the hotel room she explained: "It's the army. They must be partly in the pay of Mars. You're the finest thing that's happened in the way of friendly relations between Earth and Venus. If you take root long enough to get your message over they won't be able to pounce on Earth, to the benefit of nobody except the red planet. So they're trying to cool things off." Again the nervous glance around the room.

"What's that for?"

"Dictaphones. But I don't think there are any. So at the risk of get-

ting mushy I'm going to tell you just what I think of your job. I think you're working like a madman, with some of the finest, single-hearted devotion to the cause of peace that I've ever seen. If you keep this up and handle the rest of your life the way you're handling this part you won't be immortal—not the way Osgood is going to be—with a bust in the rotunda of the Capitol and a chapter in the history books.

"No, you're going to be something different. There are going to be Venusians—and Martians and Earthmen—who'll talk about you many, many years from now. About how their fathers and grandfathers stood in the rain to hear you talk." She looked over her spectacles. "Which reminds me—get out on that balcony and don't make any slips."

He pressed the very old, very great lady's hand silently, then, mopping his brow, stepped out to the ledge beyond his window. It was in the twilight zone of perpetual rain, and the crowd of white pates and faces before him was hardly visible through the wisps of steam. He looked about uneasily as he turned on the fog-piercing lights that flooded him with a golden glow, so that the Venusians could see their superman. As he began to speak into the mike at his lips there was a hoot of reproof from the crowd. And then there were others. Something was going the rounds; he could feel it.

Very distinctly there was a shrill cry from the sea of faces: "*Liar!*" And others echoed it, again and again. He tried to speak, but was howled down. A firm hand snapped off the lights and closed the window; Dr. Carewe dropped him into a chair, limp and shocked. She handed him a slip of paper that had just been delivered.

With her lips tightly compressed she said: "They knew before we did. Osgood spilled it—all."

THEY SHOT to Mars before assassins could take any tries at them. Weems was completely washed up and discredited on Venus; knew it and felt like it. What had his fine words been in the face of a stern, righteous declaration from the Foreign Office on Earth to the Foreign Office on Venus—gleefully published far and wide by the Mars-bribed officers in the latter—hurling the most frightful accusations of violating diplomatic immunity?

God only knew, brooded Weems, why Osgood had chosen precisely that moment to sound off. He had said fighting words, too—"back up our determination to shield the weak with deeds as well as—" Ugh! What was the matter with Osgood? The Martians couldn't touch Earth's Foreign Office; they bred them dumb but honest there. Why had Osgood—? Did he want to be an Iron Man? Did he think he could get further faster in time of war? Or did he actually, honestly believe that by this half-witted note insulting a friendly planet on account of a mere violation of etiquette he was striking a blow for justice and equality?

It probably was just that, Weems decided. And Dr. Carewe agreed.

When they landed on the red planet Weems felt very low, and was scarcely given a new lease on life by the warm reception he received from Martian notables. He was welcomed Earth fashion, with a band and speeches from a platform to twenty thousand cheering Martians. They could afford to treat him kindly; he'd failed utterly and miserably from blocking a new, magnificent

source of income to Mars—the on-rushing Earth-Venus war.

Mars wouldn't get into it. Oh, no! Mars didn't need colonies or prestige. When you have a navy like the Martian Matriarchal Fleet you don't need colonies or prestige. You just sit tight and sell the scrappers your second-rate equipment at premium prices.

At his first official reception he stood nervously among the ladies of the court. He had just received news from the Earth diplomatic colony that Venus had replied to Earth with a note just as stiff, charging that Earth was impeaching the authority of the Venusian Foreign Office with respect to its planetary jurisdiction. In plain language that meant: "Our army is bigger and better than yours. Knock this chip off—if you dare!"

One of the elegant ladies of the Matriarchal court sidled up to him. "We were presented to each other when you landed," she said in French.

"Of course," he said delightedly. "I remember you perfectly!" But all Martians still looked alike to him.

"I was wondering, Mr. Weems, whether you would care to attend a party I'm giving tomorrow evening. I feel there would be features extremely entertaining to you."

"Delighted, Madame!" He beckoned over Dr. Carewe.

"Your social secretary?" asked the Martian lady. "I'll give her the details."

Then the Karfiness entered regally and all the ladies of the court twiddled their curtailed chelae with deep veneration as she folded up in a basket-like affair.

"Mr. Weems," she said graciously. He advanced and bowed, Earth fashion, for all of his encumbering furs.

"Mr. Weems, we are delighted to see you here. Such a refreshing change from those slimy little Venusians!" Her English was perfect, though lispy.

"And I, Madame, am delighted to attend. If there is any message I can take back to Earth from you—any word of friendship, you have only to say it."

She regarded him amiably. "The people of Earth know well that the people of Mars are wholly committed to a policy of amicable industrial co-operation. Nothing will please me more than to reassure my friends of the third planet that there is no end of this policy in sight."

What did that mean? wondered Weems. Was she playing with him?

"I trust," he said, "that you are wholeheartedly working in the interests of peace among the planets?"

"So I have said," she replied simply. "So I shall always say."

Incredible! Did she take him for an imbecile? Or—or—?

"Thank you for this kind assurance," he said, bowing again and retiring.

When he had cornered Dr. Carewe he said agitatedly: "I don't get it at all. I simply don't understand. Is she lying into my teeth? The least she could have done would have been to turn aside the questions. I never dreamed I'd get an answer at a time like this!"

"Neither did I," she said slowly. "Something is rotten in the Matriarchy, and it isn't the customary scent of senile decay peculiar to dictatorships. The biology of the Martians demands a dictatorship, what with their weird reproductive methods. Unless there were a strong and centralized authority they'd slump back into barbarism after a few thousand years of unrestricted mat-

ings. Here's one dictator who's loved by the dictatees."

She was silent a moment, then said: "To change the subject, I have the place and time for tomorrow's party. The lady is—I kne', you couldn't tell one from another—director of a munitions and fabrication syndicate."

"Thanks," he said vaguely, taking the memo. "That's the perfect spot of irony to top off the evening—in fact this whole damned mission that failed."

HE WENT to the party with Dr. Carewe, both thoroughly wrapped up in fur and wool against the Martian ten-below temperature. And they carried thermos flasks full of hot coffee for an occasional warming nip in a dark corner. Anything but that would be unmannerly.

His hostess presented Weems to her husband-brother-nephew, an example of the ungodly family relationships into which their anatomy naturally led. The creature was very much smaller than the female, and spoke only Martian, which the Earthman could not handle except sparingly. He got the idea that they were talking about auriferous sand, but how they got onto the subject he did not understand. He excused himself as quickly as he could and retreated for some of the steaming coffee.

"Earthman, of course!" said a hearty voice.

He turned to see a curious, stubby person, quite human in his appearance, but with a somehow distorted look—as though he had been squeezed in a hydraulic press. And the person wore elaborately ornamental trappings of a blackish-silver metal.

"You must be a Jovian," he said,

corking the thermos. "I've never seen one of your people before. You're more—ah—human than these others."

"So they say. And you're the first Earthman I've ever seen. You're very — ah — long." They both laughed; then the Jovian introduced himself as a pilot on the regular Io-Mars freighters. He waved off Weems' introduction. "Don't bother, Weems," he said. "I know of you."

"Indeed?" There was a pause. With the diplomatic instinct to avoid embarrassment whenever possible, the Earthman asked: "Why don't your people appear more often on Earth? You could chuck some of that osmium you have to wear here on Mars."

"This?" The Jovian gestured at his trappings. "A mere drop in the bucket. I have a hundredweight in each shoe. But the reason is that Earth is relatively undeveloped in its space-culture—though, of course, much better developed than Jupiter. There are so few of us... fifty millions on the whole planet." He shrugged whimsically. "We're growing, of course. There was a polygamy decree a few years ago—did you hear of it?"

"No—I'm sorry to say I know nothing at all about your planet. I'm in the diplomatic service. Studying Venus, mostly."

"So? Perhaps you are the wrong man to come to, then. We know nothing about these matters. Is there a person more appropriate to whom I ought to broach the idea of a rapprochement between our two worlds?"

WEEMS was rocked back on his heels. Unheard of! Diplomacy as casual as this was tanta-

mount to an interplanetary incident. The Jovian continued casually as before: "You see, we've no navy and don't need space-rights. It's strictly commercial, so we haven't got any Foreign Office. We hardly trade at all with Venus and Earth, and our Mars relations are settled by treaty once every four of the Mars years."

"Excuse me," said Weems abruptly. He had just caught a high-sign from Dr. Carewe, who was holding a flimsy like a dead rat. He sidled over to her inconspicuously.

"Well—what turned up?"

"The chip," she said breathlessly, "has been knocked off. I just got this from our Embassy—messenger. It's a copy of the note the Earth F. O. just sent to Venus. The Earth F. O. assures Venus that not only does Earth impeach the Venus F. O. but that she is prepared to put its jurisdiction to trial." She handed him the flimsy.

He scanned it almost unbelievably. "The so-and-so's," he commented inaudibly. "That about fixes our little red wagon, doc. Though we have an ally. Jupiter wants its place in the sun."

As the woman stared with amazement he introduced the Jovian to her and explained the situation. The squat man listened with increasing anxiety as he dilated on the relations that would exist between the two worlds.

"Will we really," he asked at length, "need all those men—actually twenty-five on our end!—to handle a little thing like a military alliance?"

"Lord, yes!" breathed Weems. "Code clerks, secretaries, sub-secretaries, second-sub-secretaries—lots more."

"May I ask," said the woman, "why this sudden interest in proto-

col and procedure has come up on Jupiter?"

The Jovian looked a little embarrassed. "It's a matter of pride," he explained. "The three other planets have their own secret codes and messages. We're the only planet that hasn't got sealed diplomatic pouches absolutely inviolable in any jurisdiction! And so our Executive Committee decided that if it's good enough for them it's good enough for us."

"I see," said Weems thoughtfully. "But how is it that you, the A pilot on a freighter, are their Plenipotentiary without even identification?"

"As a matter of fact," confessed the Jovian with some hesitation, "I was given a note, but it seems to be lost. Do things like that really matter?"

"They do," said Weems solemnly. "But you were saying—?"

"Yes. They chose a freight pilot to avoid taking a man off real work. It's our principle of the Economization of Kinesis. Without its operation we'd have all sorts of superfluous men who did only half a man's work. And do not forget that to a people of only fifty millions that is no small matter. We need every man all the time."

"As to the treaty necessary," said the woman, "would you prefer it to be secret or published?"

"Secret," promptly replied the Jovian. "It'll be more fun that way."

Up dashed a very young sub-at-tache from the Earth Embassy. "Excuse me," he shrilled, his voice breaking. "But you have to come at once. It's important as—as the very devil, sir, if you will excuse—" He found himself addressing empty air and an amused Jovian. The two Earthpeople had flown to their sand car. They had been waiting for the summons.

THE Ambassador was waiting for them, grim and white. He was no fool, this Ambassador; his punishment for that was the dusty job on Mars instead of an office on Terra. He had just removed the ear-phone clamps, they saw; the diplomatic receiver set was on his desk.

Without waiting for a question from them he said: "The good word is—*ultimatum*."

"God!" said Dr. Carewe, her old face quite white.

"When?" snapped Weems, taking out pencil and paper.

"Note delivered to Venus F. O.—that's the note from Earth—and ten minutes or so later lynching of Venusians on the staff of the Earth Embassy by an outraged populace. Foolish defense by Earthmen attached to the Embassy. Several of them killed. Stronger note from Earth. Why didn't Venus F. O. notify immediately and offer indemnities? *Very* strong reply from Venus F. O.—chip on the shoulder. Earth knocks off chip. That's the last you saw at your party. Then ultimatum from Venus giving Earth twelve *dices* to apologize profoundly and offer an indemnity in good faith."

"And when is the time up?"

"The twelve *dices* will come to an end—" the Ambassador consulted his watch "—about forty-eight hours from now."

There was a long pause, broken at last by a muffled groan from the Ambassador. "Damn it—oh, damn it!" he wailed. "Why do the idiots have to fight? There's trade enough for everybody, isn't there?"

"And, of course," said Weems, "Earth will never back down. Not in a million years. They're built like that. And if they did back down Venus would be sure of herself and force a war."

"Well," said the woman quietly. "Are you just going to *sit* here?"

"Suggestions are in order," said the young man unhappily.

"You'll have to work like hell to stave this off," warned the woman.

"Ready and willing, doctor. Tell me what to do."

CONSIDERING that the art of diplomacy is, ultimately reduced, the system found most practical in actual use when stalling for time to rush ahead with military expansion it is not very remarkable that the two roving delegates did what they did with such neatness. The machinery was there for them to use.

Use it they did, to the fullest extent. They shot ethers through to most of the crowned heads of the inner planet; radioed Earth confidentially meanwhile to stand by for the answers from Venus; contacted the Martian Protocol Division regarding an alliance for trade purposes alone.

They were so thoroughly efficient in their functioning that after ten hours of this the bureau chiefs back on earth fell to their knees and prayed for a let-up of this lunatic barrage of red-tape that came, unasked and unanswerable, from a minor Embassy on Mars.

Venus was bally well baffled. At first they made some pretense of replying stiffly to the muted threats from the Embassy on Mars, then gave up and hung onto the ropes, trying to decode the weird messages. It *must* be code, they decided. How could a message like: "Advise your F. O. investigate frog-ponds for specious abnormalities" be anything but an uncrackable cipher? They set their experts to work. The experts decided that the message meant: "All Earthmen on Venus are advised

to sabotage production machinery and destroy records." But they were wrong as they could be, for the message meant just what it said. Its value was on its face.

The consulate and the staff were drafted by the Embassy to aid in the good work of confusion; the Ambassador himself sat for ten hours writing out messages to be sent officially which bore absolutely no relation to each other or the world at large. And if you think that sounds easy—try it!

Meanwhile the inseparables, Mr. Weems and Dr. Carewe, had been separated. The woman was gathering data from the Martian libraries and Weems was paying social calls at the Palace, interviewing secretaries without number. Meanwhile, authentic, distressing news-releases kept rushing to him, causing him great pain. First thing after the ultimatum he heard was that Earth had called in all spacers except those related to navigation—fueling stations, etc. Venus retaliated in like, and furthermore towed out the gigantic battle-islands, used to fuel fighting ships. Earth retaliated in like, and furthermore began skirmishing war games around mid-way between Terra and Luna.

By the time the ten hours of lunatic messages were elapsed the two great fleets of Earth and Venus were face to face mid-way between the planets, waiting for orders from the home-planets to fire when ready.

"For the love of Heaven," he pleaded with a secretary to the Karfiness, "they won't even wait for the ultimatum to elapse. There's going to be a space-war in two hours if I don't get to see her Serene Tentaculosity!" The title he bestowed on her was sheer whimsy; he wasn't half as upset as he was supposed to be. It was

all for effect. He rushed away, distraught by the information that he couldn't possibly see the Karfiness and aware that the munitions interests of Mars would by now be rubbing their chelae with glee.

He reached a phone and rang up the Ambassador. "Okay," he informed him. "Stop short!" The Ambassador, badly overworked and upset, stopped short with the messages. Venus and Earth were baffled again, this time because there was nothing to be baffled by. The strange silence that had fallen on the F. O.'s was alarming in its implications. The diplomatic mind had already adjusted itself to the abnormal condition; restoration of normality created almost unbearable strain. Messages rushed to the Embassy; the Ambassador left them severely alone and went to bed. From that moment anybody who touched a transmitter would be held for treason, he informed his staff. It was as though the Mars Embassy had been blown out of the ground.

"They are now," brooded Weems, "ready for anything. Let us hope that Venus hasn't lost her common sense along with her temper."

With that he set himself to the hardest job of all—waiting. He got a couple of hours of sleep, on the edge of a volcano, not knowing whether the lined-up Venus fleet would fire on the opposite Earth fleet before he woke. If he did it would be all over before he really got started.

EVEN WEEMS hadn't imagined how well his plan was taking root. Back on Earth the whole F. O. had gone yellow, trembling at the gills lest they should actually have to fight. And it was perfectly obvious that they would, for when

planetary integrity directs no mere individual might stand in the way.

There was a great dearth of news; there had been for the past few hours of the crisis. Since that God-awful business from the Mars Embassy stopped and the entire staff there had—presumably—been shot in the backs while hard at work fabricating incredible dispatches there was a mighty and sullen silence over the air, ether and sub-etheric channels of communication.

On Venus things were pretty bad too. A lot of Earthmen had been interned and the whole planet was sitting on edge waiting for something to happen. It did happen, with superb precision after exactly seven hours of silence and inactivity.

There was a frantic call from—Jupiter! *Jupiter claimed that the whole business was a feint and that the major part of the Earth fleet was even now descending on the Jovians to pillage and slay.*

The official broadcast—not a beam-dispatch—from Jupiter stated this. Earth promptly denied everything, in a stiff-necked communique.

Venus grinned out of the corner of its mouth. In an answering communique she stated that since Venus was invariably to be found on the side of the underdog the Venus Grand Fleet would depart immediately for Jupiter to engage the enemy of her good friends, the Jovians.

Earth, to demonstrate her good faith, withdrew her own fleet from anywhere near the neighborhood of Jupiter, going clear around to the other side of the Sun for maneuvers.

Lovers of peace drew great, relieved sighs. The face-to-face had been broken up. The ultimatum had been forgotten in Earth's righteous stand that she had *not* invaded Jupiter or intended to. This made Venus

look and feel silly. This made the crisis collapse as though it had never been there at all.

And just after the Venus fleet had reported to its home F. O.—this was three hours after the ultimatum had elapsed without being noticed by anybody—there were several people in the Earth Embassy on Mars acting hilariously. There was a Jovian who gurgled over and over:

"I didn't know it would be this much fun! We would have got into the game years ago if we'd known."

"And I," said the Ambassador, "have the satisfaction of knowing that I've given a pretty headache to the best code experts in the system. And all by the simple expedient of sending a code message that means just what it says."

"And I," said Weems, upending a glass, "have aided the cause of peace between the planets. If I can get to the Karfiness and let her know that she's being played for a sucker by the munitions people—"

"Let it come later," said Dr. Carewe. "I wish I could live another eighty years to read in the history books. But it really doesn't matter, because they'll say something like this:

"Toward the end of this year there arose a crisis between Earth and Venus, seemingly over matters of trade. It actually reached a point of ultimatums and reprisals. Fortunately the brilliant, calm and efficient work of the Hon. Secretary of Recession, Jowett Osgood, saved the day. He contracted a defensive alliance with Jupiter, the combined might of the Earth-Jovian fleet crushing any idea of victory that may have been the goal of the Venusians."

Dr. Carewe laughed loud and raucously as she refilled her glass.

MISSION

*It would be so easy to conquer
these primitive creatures . . .*

THE cylinder stood on the edge of a grassy plain. It was enveloped in a shimmering nimbus of golden brilliance. Lying grotesquely crumpled before the cylinder was a strange, alien figure—unmoving. . . . A little distance away was another figure, also crumpled and still, but more human-like in appearance. Fifty yards beyond began a deep forest.

Aside from the occasional murmuring breeze that rustled the grass there was no sound or movement to disturb the tableau. And the stillness made it all the more mysterious.

KRAI landed on the edge of the forest. His search for intelligent life had been unfruitful up to now. But as he passed over the forest he had seen what he was looking for. A village of tree-dwellers.

Equipping himself with a portable pressure projector, Krai let himself out through the air-lock and stepped for the first time to the surface of earth. The air-lock's outer seal—a cumbrous affair over three feet thick—swung automatically back into place behind him and, as it did, a shimmering nimbus of brilliant golden light enveloped the space ship.

Krai experienced some difficulty in accustoming himself to the heavier gravitational pull of the new planet at first. But this was short-lived.

As he moved over the plain toward the forest, Krai cut a strange figure. He was small and squat, barely four feet high; his body tri-

angular-shaped and tapering to a truncated point at the top. Three thin tentacular legs supported the trunk and provided locomotion. Four equally thin and powerful appendages were attached to the upper part of the trunk, two on the chest and one on each side of the hardly visible head. Each of Krai's two large eyes was embedded in the end of a foot-long stalk, giving him highly maneuverable and easily concentrated vision in all directions. Several spiracles dotted the lower part of the head, on each side of which was a huge ear—nature's answer to the problem of his own world's thin atmosphere.

In the denser air of the earth these latter proved very useful, if a trifle disconcerting with their powers of magnification. He could distinguish the slightest sounds at tremendous distances. The patter of an animal's feet deep in the forest; the noise of a falling branch.

In places the forest was quite thick and the going sometimes difficult, but for the most part the journey was uneventful. Presently he began to catch the sounds of movement and voices.

Krai approached warily. He realized that these people were still very primitive, had not even begun to walk on the ground. Up to now he had exercised overmuch caution because he hadn't known what to expect, but now he knew there was nothing to fear.

Detaching his pressure projector from the equipment secured to his back, Krai advanced on the alert.

His job was by no means an easy one, despite the fact that everything seemed to be working in with his plans. If he were discovered, disaster could still wreck those selfsame plans.

He paused. Through the concealing foliage he looked out upon a small clearing. In the trees surrounding this were the houses of the arboreal community and, singly and in groups, chattering gibberish to each other, its inhabitants.

THEY were outlandish-looking beings to Krai, just as he would have been to them. Nearly twice as tall as he and powerful with the strength of the brute. Few of them wore any covering, but the plentiful hair on their bodies seemed to be ample covering of itself. Communication was carried on with a combination of grunts and gestures and as far as Krai could make out the articulate part was very limited in meaning; almost incomprehensible to an intelligent mind.

So far they hadn't detected the presence of another, but the alien knew he must not tarry.

Moving into the shelter of two thick tree boles, Krai brought his pressure projector into play. The large communal house suddenly appeared to smash in upon itself, as though crushed by a giant hand. Screams of agony issued from the splintered walls as it crashed to earth. The tree-dwellers stopped everything they were doing to gaze in stupefaction at this prodigy. But before they could voice their amazement, another structure shattered under the emanation from the pressure projector. As the ray was invisible, it appeared to the thunder-struck denizens as though some angry, unseen demon were venting his displeasure

upon the village. Instinctively, a large crowd banded together for mutual protection. This was what Krai had been waiting for. They were annihilated.

Those who still lived fled. But Krai's implacable destruction sought them out and none got far before they were caught.

When the alien emerged from his place of concealment, all that remained of the village was a few heaps of shattered pulp. He had done his job well.

AS KRAI retraced his steps through the forest, his thoughts were far away. They reached back across the millions of miles of emptiness he had traversed to come here, back to his own people. They had been doomed; extinction facing them from over-population and lack of water. Mars was nearing the end, and its mighty race seemed about to share the fate of their planet, when a ray of hope came to them. The long-forgotten secret of interplanetary travel had been rediscovered. It was as a straw to the dying man.

And Mars clutched at it. A small space rocket was built with all speed. Earth, long eyed with anticipation by believers in the practicality of flight between the worlds, was chosen as the objective. Krai, an acknowledged expert in atmospheric travel and the problems confronting a space traveler, found himself selected to make the voyage. His job was to discover whether the Earth was suitable for Martian settlement, or if it could be made so. Astronomical observation had made this fairly certain, however, and that part of his task was merely one of confirmation. But he was also to ascertain whether there was any intelligent life upon

the world. If this proved to be the case and the opportunity presented itself, he was to wipe it out. It was ruthless, of course, but the Martians were facing death themselves and had to be ruthless. They couldn't take a chance on being attacked by Earth's inhabitants before they were accustomed to the new conditions and could fight back without being at a disadvantage.

The Martian felt a deep satisfaction as he made his way back to his space ship. There might still remain much to be done, but there was no doubt in his mind about the future now—a bright future and long, new life for Mars . . .

But Krai might have felt very differently had he seen the hate-filled eyes that pursued his retreating figure. One of the brute-men of the arboreal community had been absent on a private hunting expedition when the Martian began hostilities, only returning in time to see the demon (as Krai appeared to the savage mind) leaving the scene of destruction.

The tree-dweller's first thought was of his mate. But prudence dictated that he remain concealed till the retreating form of the demon disappeared among the trees. Then he searched frantically for his mate. Eventually he found her—crushed among the splinters of their tree-house.

A terrible, burning hate took hold of the savage. An all-consuming hate overcame his instinctive fear of the demon-thing he had seen. Thoughts of revenge crowded all else from his mind.

Then, with quick resolve, the tree-man took to the trees in pursuit of the demon. His hyper-sharp sense of smell soon enabled him to pick up the trail of his quarry. Presently the forest began to thin out, giving way

to open plain. Nearing the edge of the trees, the eagle eyes detected movement, then the grotesquely alien figure of the demon-thing came into view. Krai was in the open now. With a spurt of speed, accelerated by white-hot hate, the pursuer reached the edge of the forest—too late.

THE Martian was nearly to his ship. Another moment and he would be safe. The brute-man hated the ground and feared the incredible powers of the demon-thing too much to risk physical combat. There was only one chance.

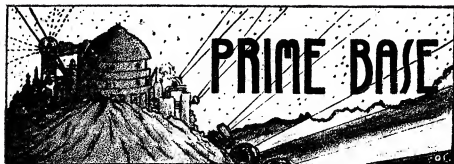
Whipping a huge, jagged-edged stone from his girdle, the tree-dweller hurled it with all the energy of his tremendous thews. With deadly accuracy the stone shot through the air. Krai never knew what hit him; his brain-case was shattered like an egg-shell. He dropped in his tracks.

His desire for revenge satisfied, the tree-dweller began to comprehend the magnitude of his feat. Single-handed, he had killed the demon-thing that destroyed his people! For a moment he was a little dizzy with the enormity of it.

Then, attracted by the golden glow of the big cylinder, the brute-man forgot all else to investigate this new miracle. He was confident in his ability to deal with anything that arose now and the shimmering beauty of the golden emanation intrigued him.

He reached out tentatively. As the hirsute hand passed through the nimbus a look of startled surprise appeared on the face of the tree-dweller.

Then he collapsed. As the limp hand broke contact with the brilliance surrounding the space ship there was an almost perceptible crackle of energy. And for a moment the acrid pungence of ozone hung in the air.



THIS issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly* is dedicated to one of science fiction and fantasy's topmost artists: Hannes Bok.

He started drawing at the age of twelve: it seems there was a beautiful blonde in his class. If anyone has seen her, says Hannes, will they please forward her present address—if she's still single, of course.

Some time later, someone gave him a copy of the July, 1927, issue of the old *Amazing Stories*, which same contained part three (conclusion) of "The Moon Pool." There he made his first contact with A. Merritt and Frank R. Paul, two of the three figures who are his shining idols in the field of fantasy. But on that day, Bok got the ambition to write and illustrate fantasy.

His third idol was Ray Cummings. He came across "Tarrano, the Conqueror" in *Science and Invention*, with the multitude of illustrations by Paul, and obtained such other classics as "The Metal Monster," "The Man on the Meteor," "Around the Universe," and "Into the Fourth Dimension" later.

He wanted to learn to draw—so he drew. In his spare time he filled page upon page with sketches, drawings, stuff. He drew his own illustrations for such favorites as "The Ship of Ishtar" or tales from the *Arabian Nights*; he drew fantastic scenes suggested by great operas.

And he started writing soon after. Short stories, long stories, written out in long-hand, usually in pencil, in notebooks. Revised later, typed, bound in special big books.

He made his appearance in the fan field with a cover design for the *Fantasy Magazine* supplement-serial "Cosmos."

In 1939 a science fiction convention was held in New York. To this convention came several fans from the west coast, among them Ray Bradbury, armed with samples of Bok to show to Farnsworth Wright, then editor of *Weird Tales*. They made an immediate hit. He first appeared as cover artist for the December, 1939, issue of *Weird Tales*, illustrating a story by David H. Keller, another of his favorites. He also had several black-and-white illustrations in the same issue.

Needless to say, Bok was an instantaneous hit with fantasy fans. And with the general readers. But the fans immediately started flooding him with requests for covers and sketches for their publications: Hannes dug into his voluminous files and donated pictures generously.

He first appeared in *Future Fiction* in the November 1940 issue, and in *Science Fiction Quarterly* for the issue of Spring, 1941.

Last summer, Hannes realized one of his big ambitions, when he did the double-spread for *Science Fiction Quarterly's* reprint of "Tarrano, the Conqueror" (issue No. 4), and for *Future Combined with Science Fiction's* reprint of "The Man on the Meteor." He still hopes, some day, to illustrate a Merritt tale.

Hannes is 5' 10", has big brown eyes, and brown hair. One of his secret sorrows is that he is not a six-footer. He hails from St. Paul, Seattle, and California. In 1935 he first came to New York; met Boris Dolgov (whom he was later to introduce

to fantasy illustrating) at a Washington Square sidewalk art exhibit in 1936.

Some of his pet raves are: Sibelius, Chinese art, Tchaikovsky, food, Stravinsky, Marlene Dietrich, mice, and Cecil Corwin. He has a mouse in his house: one day he made a trap using a milk bottle and a trail of butter. The mouse followed the trail to the bottle, then, when it was inside, Hannes quickly set bottle upright. Now the mouse sleeps in a bird cage, in a little nest of cotton it made from wadding Hannes gave it, and, no doubt poses for any number of drawings.

Some of his ambitions are: to do a frontispiece for a poetry page, to do covers which will be printed without lettering over them, to find a good collaborator for drawings, and to hit the standards of traditional Chinese art.

His pet peeves are people who drop in on him without telephoning (Bok has a legion of admirers who drive him mad with their constant squatting in his studio while he tries to work), people who talk while he's listening to music, and people who gleep in the movies, and distract his attention from the screen.

He's particularly fond of Martin Pearson's "Ajax Calkins" stories, which he illustrates, and is constantly putting pressure on your editor to keep the series running until there'll be enough of them for him to bind in a little volume. He's very fond of the cover he did for the first in the series "Pogo Planet." (It appeared in the October, 1941, issue of *Future Combined with Science Fiction*.)

And we're happy to dedicate this issue of the Quarterly, containing one of his favorite Ray Cummings novels, to Hannes Bok.

THERE'S particularly good news for you Bok admirers in the February (current) issue of *Future Combined with Science Fiction*, for not only has Hannes drawn a superb cover for the book, but it is an illustration for his own first-published story, "The Alien Vibration." He also has a dandy full-page illustration for it.

This issue features another of the popular reprint classics by Ray Cummings. The present one is "Beyond the Stars," a macrocosmic story, for which a lovely double-spread illustration, and half-page interior has been drawn by Boris Dolgov.

Also in this issue can be found "My Ob-

ject All Sublime," by the perennial stf favorite, Lyle Monroe, "The Pit of Doom," by one of science fiction's old masters, David H. Keller, MD. Dr. Keller is now a Lt. Colonel in the U. S. Armed forces, so does not have much time for writing; we're particularly happy to have one of his now-rare stf tales for this issue: Bok illustrates it. And, finally, but by no means least, there's a fine short-short by a Canadian author, John Hollis Mason. It's titled "Sacrifice" and you'll enjoy it.

As usual, the departments "Station X" and "Futurian Times" appear. Damon Knight, our newest stf illustrator, has done a head for the former, and did the drawing for Lyle Monroe's tale.

May we suggest, then, you visit your newsstand without delay? If perchance he should be out of copies, you can obtain same from this office: merely send 15c in stamps or coin to *Future Combined with Science Fiction*, 60 Hudson Street, New York City. All back issues of *Science Fiction* magazine, *Future Fiction*, and *Science Fiction Quarterly* are still available.

HERE is how the Winter Quarterly came out, according to your letters and votes. Tied for first place were "Sir Mallory's Magnitude," by S. D. Gottesman, and "Caridi Shall Not Die" by Walter Kubilius, each receiving a score of 9. (0 equals just fair; 1 to 3 equals above average; 4 to 7 means definitely good; 8 to 9 means very good, and 10 is terrific.) In second place came Hugh Raymond's "The Year of Uniting," scoring 8; tied for third place were "Into the Fourth Dimension" by Ray Cummings, and "When Anteros Came" by James Blish, each with 4; while "Power Plant," by Lee Gregor and "Ephony's Spectacles" by Clarence Granoski came in fifth and sixth places.

The cover was liked, placing at 6; Prime Base at 7, and the interior artwork rated thusly: Bok and Dolgov were heartily raved over, each getting a score of 10, while Forte and Knight came second and third. All in all, the 5th Quarterly seemed to have gone over with you readers.

BILL STOYR writes: "In regard to 'The Year of Uniting,' Raymond develops the idea of a scientific society quite logically. Even today, there is a large portion of people having an almost fetish-like belief in science, not realizing the dan-

gerous extremes toward which even such a beneficial power as science can be led. Thus, in times of stress, when other forms of government crumble, it isn't hard to see that science might be resorted to as a last refuge and a form of dictatorship evolve thru its over-emphasis. But . . . I'm extremely pessimistic about this World Confederation mentioned herein. True, the world might possibly make a sudden, unexpected move toward democracy et al, but it could definitely not achieve the results described by Raymond in the short period of fifteen years! More nearly two hundred! Didja ever read 'The first to Awaken' by Hicks and Bennett? It has some faults of its own, but it's more interesting, and a darn sight more logical—despite its obvious advantage of novel length."

WHEREAT we comment. The thing that struck us most about the "scientific government" in "The Year of Uniting" was that it was decidedly unscientific. After all, human relationships are as much a province of science as anything else, and the experience of many centuries has shown that the most scientific way for humanity to function at its "best" is through use of the democratic method in all parts of society. The proponents of the type of "scientific" society Raymond describes make much of the fact that you can't vote on strictly technical matters: no majority can repeal the law of gravitation, for example. However, that is beside the point. True, there may be only one way for a machine to operate most efficiently, but the machine is not producing for similar machines, but for very complex organisms known as human beings, who do not follow simple courses of reaction and behaviour as do these mechanisms. We believe that homo sapiens *can* be understood, and his actions and behaviour comprehended, the laws behind them found, but we doubt that they *have* been found as yet. So, despite many of the advantages (superficial and temporary at best) inherent in the totalitarian form of society, based on "leadership" principles, whether they be formulated in "scientific" terms, or mystical theories as with Hitlerism, history has still shown the vast superiority of the democratic society. The present world conflict, into which our nation is now throwing its full military support, will further demonstrate

that superiority as the totalitarian states crumble and collapse before the armed forces of the free peoples of the world.

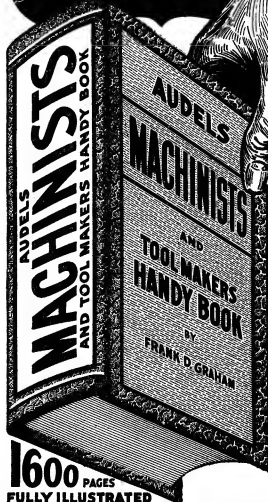
WE'D like to add, at the risk of repetition, that whatever we say in our comments is to be regarded as our opinion, and not the last word on any subject. We recall a number of editors, back in the days when we were fans, who declined to enter into readers' discussions because they didn't want to have the last word, didn't want to squelch debate. We have a higher opinion of our readers and are confident that they won't be squelched by our remarks if they disagree with them. So, let's hear your ideas on any subject brought up here if you dissent—or even if you agree, but have more, and interesting, data to add.

Prime Base, we might add, will be reserved for discussions around various debatable points in our stories, rather than pro and con comments upon the stories. We welcome the latter for our rating sheet, but feel that the former will be of greater interest. For a full readers' column, see Station X in *Putnare*.

THAT about winds us up for this time. We have some fan mags to review, but they'll have to go into *Futurian Times*, as space won't permit their inclusion here. We would like to mention, however, one publication: *Fantasy Fiction Field's Illustrated Nyon Review*. This is an attractive pamphlet (large size) filled with photographs and official writeups of the First World Science Fiction Convention, held in New York in July, 1939. It's something that no fan can afford to miss. The first edition will be out by the time you read this, and is selling for 50 cents the copy—an extremely low price considering the cost of the photos alone. It's published by Julius Unger, 1702 Dahill Road, Brooklyn, New York; a postal will be sufficient to obtain information as to whether copies are still available, or to request the reservation of a copy of the second edition.

So, we bid you adieu for the nonce and trust you will have enjoyed and entered well upon a happy new year. A year of victory for the nation, our allies, and the forces of democracy throughout the world, and a year of personal advancement and happiness for all of you. Until we meet again with another issue of the Quarterly, happy reading! RWL

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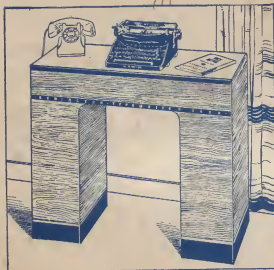
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